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BOARD MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES IN THE
GOVERNANCE OF AN INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN SCHOOL:

by

Michelle Lundgren

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Laura Schulte

Omaha, Nebraska

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DISSERTATION TITLE

Board Members' Perceptions of Their Roles in the

Govenance of an Independent Christian School

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GOVERNANCE OF AN INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES

Michelle L. Lundgren, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2004

Advisor: Dr. Laura Schulte

The purpose of this study was to explore board members' perceptions of their roles at an independent Christian school. The study was exploratory and interviews were used to elicit the members' perceptions. The participants included eight board members and the head administrator of a K-12 Christian school in the Midwest. Interviews were conducted with each participant two times during the school year. Questions focused on topics derived from the available literature dealing with public and private school boards and from the experience of the researcher. Qualitative data analysis methodology was used.

The board members answered the questions both as individuals and from the whole board's perspective. Several themes emerged from the data analysis. From those themes the board members' role perceptions emerged. The role perceptions generated from the data included: respond to the call, be advocates for Christian education, make a unique and positive difference, select quality leadership personnel, raise funds and control them, make policy, evaluate the administrator, maintain positive relationships with the teachers and the parents, act as peacemakers, be students of board basics, and plan for the future. The board members believed they had been "called" for their roles. From this high calling came their purpose and drive to make a difference in the lives of students, teachers, and families. This board was very much affected by various issues

taking place at the time of the study. The relationships experienced among the board members and the administrator, teachers, and parents very much influenced their perceptions. The type and amount of training perceived to be necessary to become a competent board member was also an important issue. Role conflict affected the board members' perceptions. There was also one expected role that failed to emerge from the data. The board members' perceptions of their roles did not include setting policy related to student achievement outcomes.

The study resulted in a better understanding of how board members see/perceive their roles. It did not result in a better understanding of their actual roles – which, in fact, the author recommends changes such as less direct intervention in school operation and more training in appropriate role behavior.

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Finally, I thank the board members who participated in this study. I am privileged to have had an in-depth view of them in their roles as board members. They demonstrated their trust in me by sharing candidly their struggles as well as their victories. From the experience I have gained new insight into the complex and difficult job board members face at an independent Christian school. I hope this study helps them in their continued quest for excellence that is demonstrated throughout these pages by their thoughtful insights.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The governance of the independent Christian school is in some ways similar to public school governance, but differs in other significant ways. Governance of these schools begs a more in-depth look. Some governance roles are standard to all school boards, including independent Christian school boards (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, & Usdan, 1985; Good, 1999; Lyons, 1991; Murray, 1997; Ziegler, 1976). For example, all school boards bear fiscal responsibility for the school (Burrup, Brimley, & Garfield, 1999) and the setting of policy for the school or district (Streich, 1999). The outstanding added dimension, however, is that beyond the typical excellence in academics goals of schools, the Christian school also seeks to instill a “God-consciousness” in all of its students (Haddock, 1995).

Because some of the purposes of independent Christian schools are very different from those in the public sector, perhaps the roles of their school board members are also. There is no attempt to keep the subject of faith in God out of the classroom in these schools. That is, in fact, the ultimate reason they exist. These schools either receive very limited or no funds from the state or federal government. These issues and others may affect the roles played by board members. Without a doubt, their status as private schools allows them more flexibility in governance issues.

There is no research on the governance of independent Christian schools. More specifically, there is no research on governance of the independent Christian school within the legal framework of the state in which it resides. A search of the ERIC

database turned up many articles dealing with public school governance. This was also true of some related searches to sites on-line such as the American School Board Journal. Also, within these searches 15-20 articles were found on Catholic and private school governance issues. The only source for the independent Christian school is the journal from the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), Christian School Administrator. ACSI has also published some books that deal with the governance of these schools. The dozen or so articles from these sources only deal with the phenomenon of the independent Christian school as a part of the picture of all Christian schools.

A noticeable growth in the number of Christian schools in the United States began about 20+ years ago, and the number of these schools has continued to increase (Turner, 1981). The Association of Christian Schools International reports 4,000 member K-12 schools included in its worldwide membership for the 2000/2001 school year. These schools serve over one million students. In the United States, ACSI reported over 3,500 member schools, of which 381 reside in the Mid-America region which covers nine states (ACSI, 2000). These numbers represent both "church" schools (schools with significant support from a particular church or denomination) and independent Christian schools that receive no significant support from any particular church or denomination. There also are additional Christian schools that are not members of such organizations.

It is important for the educational community as a whole to understand these types of schools. There have been many misconceptions about them. The growth of

the public school movement early in our nation's history encouraged some people to advocate eliminating all non-public schools (Campbell et al., 1985), but with the 1925 Supreme Court case of *Pierce v. Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, the court ruled that it was unconstitutional to do away with non-public schools. In a legal sense, private schools are here to stay, although they may still feel they exist in a sometimes hostile, competitive educational environment. Although their existence is protected legally, they do not qualify for all the tax dollars that benefit the public school system. This definitely increases the challenge of governing these schools effectively. These schools can be regulated by the states in which they exist (Campbell et al., 1985). The specific regulations of each state can be very different. Taking a close look at the perceived roles of the board members of one independent Christian school will help us understand the specific school studied and should also help us to begin to identify the broader issues of governance for independent Christian schools and their constituents.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how board members at an independent Christian school perceived their roles. This exploration sought to understand the governance issues and the dynamics at work on these boards. An exploratory study design was used to collect detailed information using the interview as the primary source of data collection (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1989). This subject had not been researched in any depth before, thus an exploratory study was appropriate (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The specific object of study was a unique bounded system.

Exploratory studies explore complex circumstances that are not explored in the literature and result in rich descriptions of those complex circumstances (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Research Questions

The grand tour question asked by this study was: How do board members perceive their roles?

Definition of Terms

Independent Christian schools have been established with a curriculum and staff that promote a definite viewpoint of the Christian faith; more specifically, the evangelical Protestant Christian faith. These schools include students and their families who may attend a wide variety of church denominations. These schools are not under the auspices of any one particular church or denomination. The governance of independent Christian schools is by school board, not a church board.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the school board of one medium sized, K-12 independent Christian school in the Midwest. It was conducted during a year when much focus was on the hiring of a new administrator. The year of the study followed a very tumultuous time for the school the preceding school year. The study represents one "snapshot in time" consisting of one school year.

Significance of the Study

There is no research on the governance of the independent Christian school. This study provided valuable information for the school involved. The value to the

school itself was that it provided an impetus for reflection upon its own functioning as seen through the eyes of the researcher. This research may also benefit independent Christian schools nation wide. This study may help the public sector as well to better understand the independent Christian school in general.

This research study provides a glimpse into governance issues at one school, by one board. There is no study such as this available to these types of school boards. These schools often exist in isolation from other schools that operate with similar missions. The schools may share membership in the broader public sector organizations that really do not address their specific needs. There are national Christian school organizations that deal with issues significant to the Christian school, but the issues are dealt with in a general way by such organizations. Investigating and seeking to understand the governance of an independent Christian school through its board members' perceptions, provided knowledge and thick rich description about this particular school board as it governed the school in the midst of a school year. With this acquired knowledge, those in leadership positions might be able to reflect upon why things are done in a certain manner and thought can be given by those who examine the facts as to whether it should be done any differently. The collection of the data provides an opportunity for purposeful reflection by the board members about the functioning of the board.

For those outside this particular school organization, but with a similar program, insights may be gained from the study of the similar and dissimilar issues of this board. This particular independent Christian school has a sound reputation for

academic strength and is one of the few accredited K-12 programs of its kind in the state. The achievement of and the desire for accreditation means that this school has had to closely examine itself and bring its program up to certain standards. I have assumed that most schools similar to this one would find the school board members' perceptions valuable.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

The school board in the United States of America has been very much impacted by lay control. This lay control began in colonial times and has been the model for school boards both public and private (Cremin, 1970). While the literature pertaining to the public school board is considerable, that pertaining to private school boards is not nearly as extensive. The literature on the independent Christian school board is minimal.

This review of the literature discusses governance issues of school boards in general. Information that applies to private and independent Christian schools is included as well as information on public schools. Because the governance of the independent Christian school is patterned after the public school system of governance, many of the issues facing the two types of school boards are similar.

There are some basic roles in which the typical school board engages whether public or private. The major role of the board is the matter of establishing policy for the school or district (Campbell et al., 1985). Other board roles in this study include hiring and maintaining a good relationship with the superintendent or head administrator, communicating with the public, and providing for the training of board members so that they can be effective. Since the publication of A Nation at Risk (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), there has been much talk about changing the traditional governance provided by school boards. Dissatisfaction

with school boards in general has been expressed (Sewall, 1996). The concerns generated by this major publication reached into the private sector as well.

Policy Setting

The setting of policy is a very broad role of boards of education. Policy can be used as a very effective tool. The policy-setting role of a board can have wide-ranging effects (Ramirez, 1995; Schultz, 1998; Streich, 1999). If a board is lax in giving enough attention to the setting of sound policy, the problems facing the school or district increase. Progressive policy setting is key to school board effectiveness in improving the academic performance of students. The setting of policy is best accomplished after the board has set goals that act as a guide to help keep it focused. The general summation of a school's or district's goals can be found in its mission statement. The reason for goal setting is to keep the board on track as to its main functions. In his work over 25 years as a Christian school principal and superintendent, Schultz (1998) concluded that many board members at independent Christian schools feel they are spending much of their time on issues that may have nothing to do with the board's goals. Much of their time seems to be spent on matters that should be dealt with by the administration of the school.

Deuink and Herbster in their 1986 book Effective Christian School Management found that most Christian schools develop policy only as it is needed. Often the direction for the school's future is neglected. They argue that by operating this way a school can only achieve its goals by accident.

Ramirez (1995) identifies five stages that he believes to be important in the setting of policy. The first stage is to identify the issues by being on the lookout for external issues and trends as well as searching out internal information. The second step is to set priorities. Returning to the key goals and mission established by the district to determine how important the particular issue is at the present time can help set priorities. The third step is for the board to analyze and study the issue more closely to see how best to deal with it. There are many strategies that could be included in this step of policy setting. The fourth step is to take the necessary action. The best option to deal with the particular issue should now be taken. This comes after extensive preparation. Policy issues are of major consideration. The last step is to focus upon follow through. This is crucial to effective policy setting. Within this step is some kind of evaluation of the results.

One key reason to set policy is to improve performance of students. Streich (1999) calls them "policies of excellence". He believes that to have policies that improve performance there must be a "criteria of excellence" applied to each and every policy. Within these criteria one should see a focus on learning outcomes and a way of reporting the results to the board and community. Also provided within the policy should be attention to staff development and an emphasis on improving the learning of all children.

No matter how good policies may be they will not be effective without the involvement of the larger community and the home. School boards are more effective when they build a link between both the community and home. Schools do not exist in

a vacuum and today's school boards must set policy after taking into consideration the bigger picture of home and community (Adelman & Taylor, 1998).

Included in the setting of policy is the function that is often reported as taking the most time: funding and budgets (Convey, 1995). Setting financial policies is much different for the public versus the private board. The budget of a private school has little or nothing to do with tax dollars. That is why the private school board, whether independent or governed by a church board, must give much time and attention to policies that deal with fundraising (Convey, 1995). Whether a school is public or private, its board should be aware of the data suggesting that although allocation of monies cannot be directly tied to student achievement, there is a connection between adequate funding of school programs and student success (Land, 2002).

Relationship With Head Administrator

In 1929, William McAndrew was featured in a book called The Nation's Schools (Judd, 1934). His main concern was school board management in the area of dealing with the head administrator in a manner that was not fraught with politics and favoritism. McAndrew was a superintendent who was forced out of his career of choice because of the deterioration of his relationship with his board. He also cited the cases of other head administrators in his situation. The conclusion to which McAndrew came was that the boards in question had no concept of their duty and that they represented the personal interests of the members, not the school district. It does not seem as though the relationship between the board and the head administrators of schools has changed all that much in 75 years.

The basic cause for school board and school administration differences is the problem of determining which decisions belong to the professional educators and which belong to the lay board members (James, 1967). Johnson (1980) defines an important role of the board as that of appointing the chief executive officer and delegating to him or her the responsibility for operating the organization. Just like many head administrators, McAndrew felt that the school could do its best work if the board understood and accepted a basic division of responsibilities.

From where do most of the conflicts come between the board and head administrator? The public and private interests of the board member and the expectations of the administration seem to be critical (Bryant & Grady, 1991). There are some common types of conflict that have been identified by head administrators and reported by Bryant and Grady (1991). The most frequent conflict area is that of family and friends. It may have to do with a ruling that involves the child of a board member or relative. It also may involve the hiring or reluctance to hire a relative of a board member. This type of conflict also extends to friends of board members as well.

The type of conflict mentioned next was that of hiring and firing in general. Conflicts often arise when the board attempts to hire or fire employees against the recommendation of the head administrator. Sometimes boards act without even asking the head administrator. Many of these examples have to do with the board either chastising or firing personnel for what members viewed as inferior work. This often had to do with athletics and coaching and whether or not the coaches have successful seasons.

Another area of conflict reported by head administrators results from their role uncertainty. The particular decisions in question were ones that were understood to be in the realm of the administration, not the board. For example, incidents of board members giving in to requests from the community for special favors when it came to certain decisions were cited.

Both head administrators and school boards recognize the fact that the board is a target for special interest groups. Boards susceptible to the pressures of these groups can become ineffective. Some researchers believe that different perceptions of what are the most important issues facing a school or district may add to this tension (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998; Gilligan, 1980). It is only by coming to an agreement on the prioritizing of issues, that time will be used most effectively by both the board and the administration.

There are some practices that seem to help the administrator/board relationship. Carver (1998) feels the board can be more effective by being less involved. If a board is directly involved with the day-to-day operation of the schools, it loses sight more easily of its role in the big picture. It is better to stay up-to-date through the use of reports. The agendas of these boards tend to be more crisp and business like. Some researchers feel that the best relationships between boards and head administrators are those in which the board acts as a cheerleader for the person the board sees as competent, trustworthy, and hard working (Carver, 1998). The board members should look at the administrator as their representative. Not only must they hire the right

person, but they must also support him or her completely. The basic element for this type of relationship is trust (Carver, 1998; Schultz, 1998).

For the administrator's part, he or she should try to cultivate a good working relationship with the board. Young (1998) believes through relationship building comes trust and teamwork in getting things accomplished. The administrator is well served if he or she does a complete job of communicating with the board. The communication must be timely and effective. Kynerd (1998) writes that the board also is looking for an administrator who demonstrates integrity in every issue.

To summarize the role of the head administrator and that of the board would be to state that the role of the board is to formulate the policy and that the role of the head administrator is to carry it out (Campbell et al., 1985). Of course, most administrators influence the policy made by boards and most boards have a voice in the way in which the administrator carries out the policy. Perhaps the better summary is to see the two entities as partners, with each partner making unique contributions (Houle, 1962). An unhealthy balance exists when either the board acts as a rubber stamp for the administrator (although an initial 'honeymoon period' often exists), or the administrator is viewed as nothing but a hired hand by the board (Campbell et al., 1985).

Communication

Whether a school is private or public, the issue of communication with its constituents is key. In public schooling the funds come from the taxpayers. In private schooling the funds come predominantly from tuition. Therefore, the constituents of both types of schools rightly feel they should be involved in and informed of the

governance of those schools. This kind of involvement can be healthy if it is based upon correct and factual knowledge of the issues facing the board. When it comes to communication, the critics of education take up about twice as much time as the supporters (Ledell, 1996). Attention needs to be redirected and lines of communication must be open to the vast majority of the constituents. Ledell also feels it is advisable to set up a communications team so that the word gets out effectively and in a balanced and fair manner.

When it comes to communication between the members of the school community and the board, many parents feel powerless. To be an effective communicator with the school board, it is necessary to completely understand the issues. According to Dunn (1999), it always helps to personalize the issues and the message, be reasonable, and seek opportunities to build coalitions.

In the matter of the Christian school, the board has to have its own understanding of a biblical philosophy of educating young people. It then has to take on the responsibility of communicating this philosophy so that its constituents understand (Schultz, 1998). These board members must be able to articulate a philosophy of Christian education (Sligh, 1999).

Another key communication issue in the Christian school is what is called the "Matthew 18 Principle". This principle deals with handling complaints or grievances. It is based upon biblical scripture. From the scripture the following guidelines are extracted: Keep the matter confidential. The only people involved should be those who need to be involved. The communication should be open and straightforward.

The parties should be quick to forgive each other. The chain of communication should also be strictly followed. If the matter can be settled, it should be settled at the lowest level. If it cannot, it should be taken to the next level in an orderly manner. For example, if a parent and teacher cannot settle a matter, they should agree to take it together to the principal. If necessary, the principal should seek the help of the chairperson of the school board. Kienel (1986) estimates that in this way 80% of school problems are solved at the two-person level. Another 18% are solved at the two to three person levels. This should leave about 2% to be solved at the school board level. The success of the principle seems to depend on the willingness of the school's constituents to use it.

Training of School Board Members

Thirteen states have laws that require training for public school board members (Grady & Krumm, 1998). The states that require the training are Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The training is available from various agencies in the states. Many more states have voluntary training for their board members. Training of board members in private schools is, of course, voluntary.

Grady and Krumm (1998) studied the training available to boards of education. They found that the most common form of training was annual conventions, followed by orientations provided for the local board members. Regional meetings were listed as a resource, and training for board presidents was cited by the various states and boards as useful. The forms of training mentioned least often were winter conferences

and board retreats. The same study revealed the preferences of several head administrators when it comes to board training. The head administrators indicated that boards could use training in the areas of relationships, duties, roles, and interpersonal skills; how to conduct a head administrator search; dealing with school athletics; understanding the responsibilities of being a board member; and understanding conflicts of interest. To determine whether the training for a particular board is sufficient, a needs assessment would be valuable.

In Scarsdale, New York, it might be argued that the best way to insure a well-trained board is to make sure the board members are highly qualified in the first place. Scarsdale has a nominating committee that only nominates qualified candidates to run for a board position. It is a very efficient and successful system (Marlowe, 1997). The nominating committee method is more common in the private school arena. These committees seek candidates based on certain criteria. The nominating committee method provides a way to screen out potentially undesirable board members (Sheehan, 1990). The private sector provides training for its board members in various ways as well. Christian school associations recommend planned in-services and also provide conferences and seminars so that the board members can understand the biblical educational philosophy and mindset (Lowrie, 1988).

Over 20 years ago, the typical member of a board of education spent about 20 hours a month on normal board activities, which included nine hours a month on meetings, four hours preparing for those meetings, four hours in reflective thinking about board business, and three hours dealing directly with the school and the patrons

of the school (O'Reilly, 1981). With the mounting issues dealt with by school boards each year, it can be surmised that one obstacle to the training of board members is time. The time that board members spend in self-reflection, assessment, self-improvement and training is time that is well spent (Smoley, 1999).

Change/Reform

The powers and duties of the local school board, as we know it, have been eroded and usurped in recent years. Many feel the local control of schools is definitely changing due to the increased funding and regulation being provided by the federal government (Burrup et al., 1999).

In light of A Nation At Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a report presented in 1988 by the Department of Education and the National Governors' Association recommended the following reforms to come from the federal government:

- establish school board academies to train board members,
- encourage only well-qualified citizens to seek board positions,
- exempt those districts that meet certain standards from certain regulations,
- strengthen partnerships with business and higher education, and
- develop school effectiveness indicators (Paulu, 1988, p. 2).

There are people like Seymour Sarason, professor emeritus at Yale University, who have been calling for the dissolution of the local school board for years. His reasoning is that all those who are affected by a decision need a hand in the process. His goal in this reform proposal is to establish parent reconnection with the schools

(Harrison, 1996). Abolishment or the weakening of school boards is a reality in some situations. In Cincinnati power has been shifted, in part, to an entity from the business community. Because of financial concerns, the Newark school board was displaced by the state of New Jersey. In Arkansas, districts that are in financial or academic distress are being taken over by the state. Other districts nation-wide are hiring private organizations to run their school districts (Sewall, 1996).

Our neighbors to the north in New Brunswick, Canada, have abolished the traditional board of education, and many other provinces are reducing its power. The demise of the New Brunswick board began in the same way as many United States' school boards. The local property tax rates were seen as very unfair between the rich and poor districts. School districts were reduced in number. With less and less districts, the boards became more and more removed from the local issues. Less power for boards meant less interest in serving on them. The downward spiral resulted in the public looking more and more to the central government for answers and the elimination of the board system of governance altogether (Chalker & Haynes, 1997).

According to Kaufhold (1997), for those interested in maintaining the governance of a local board, it is important to recognize whether or not the board is at risk of becoming ineffective and being replaced. Six danger signs include:

Do board members come to meetings unprepared?

Do the members engage in prolonged debate?

Do the members travel extensively at the expense of other school personnel?

Do local politics and nepotism take precedence over the welfare of students?

Does the board engage in micromanagement?

Is the board quick to buy out the head administrator's contract?

Whitson (1998) is of the opinion that the local school board is obsolete. He does not believe the local board is competent or informed enough to be making the decisions that affect so many lives. Instead, he favors a national system that would be scrutinized to make sure that all schools meet certain standards. Whitson thinks that the local school board is too inclined to try untested theories that can have disastrous consequences. Many do argue for keeping the traditional school board in tact. The thought is that even with faults, the traditional boards have been advocates for students and teachers and boards are the type of governance that the public desires (McBeath, 1995).

Is the independent Christian school likely to change from the elected school board as its standard form of governance? Because this system of governance is patterned after the public sector, perhaps any attempt at a new model of governance will also come from the public sector. A larger entity, such as the state, taking over the governance of the private school is not a possibility, although a private enterprise or business could be brought in to govern these schools. Other changes of structure that occur in the future to the public school board could influence these schools just as the predominant model of the elected school board has for all these years. There may be many effective board models among independent Christian schools, as well as some defective ones. The traditional board system of governance has been the predominant one (Lowrie, 1988).

Summary

The traditional board of education has a long history in public education. The private sector of education has also used this model, including the independent Christian school. The amount of literature that deals with public school governance is substantial, but the literature available on the governance of the independent Christian school is very limited. Rex Filmer, who is employed by the state of Nebraska in the Department of School Accreditation, finds little difference in the issues that face public school boards and the board members of independent Christian schools (personal communication, April, 2001). He cites such issues as the confusion that sometimes exists between the function of the board and the function of the head administrator. Dr. Filmer also sees the financial struggles of each type of board and the qualifications of the board members themselves as similarities between the public sector and the independent Christian school board. There are many other factors that are unique to one or the other. The study of the role perceptions of board members of an independent Christian school should be helpful to Christian schools in ways that will enable them to better serve students and families. It will also add to the general education community's understanding of these schools and their place in the overall education landscape.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore how board members perceived their roles at an independent Christian school. This chapter describes the methods used to conduct this study. The first section deals with the design of qualitative research. The next discusses an exploratory study, which was the specific approach used in this investigation. Also included is a section on the role of the researcher and a description of the people and places involved in the process. Ethical considerations were taken into account all along the way. The data collection process and the analysis of those data also are detailed in this chapter. The chapter ends with a discussion of how the results of the study were verified and reported.

Qualitative Research Design

This was an exploratory study conducted within the qualitative paradigm that assumes multiple realities and that all the parts of any given reality are interrelated (Guba, 1981). A qualitative approach relies on inductive logic. This method leads to the explanation of a phenomenon through the use of patterns. Words such as *understanding, discover, and meaning* are central to qualitative research (Creswell, 1994). A qualitative design was appropriate for such an investigation because governance decisions are the result of individual board member's perceptions and interpretations of events, people, and processes.

The Exploratory Study

An exploratory study is appropriate when a subject has not been researched before, or has not been researched in any depth, or to investigate little-understood phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This study examined the role perceptions of individual board members. Any situation, response to a situation or interpretation of a situation may be perceived differently by each individual. Each individual in an organization determines his or her role within that organization. The organization itself cannot define this for the individual (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Role of the Researcher

I served at an independent Christian school for 15 years. During that time, I was a teacher and an administrator. I have been a member of a school board as an elected representative of the faculty. I have served with board members on various committees over the years. I have also served as a non-voting member of a board in my position as head administrator.

While I brought certain biases related to my previous experiences with boards, I believe that I was able to approach this study with an open mind. I have no official ties to the school board I studied. The governing of these schools varies from school to school. I do not believe there is one right method that boards should employ in governing the independent Christian school. Each school has its own culture and priorities. Each board has its own personality and approach. I made every effort to keep an open mind and maintain an investigative approach.

The following safeguards were in place to assure the protection of the informants and unbiased research:

1. The objectives and overview of the study were communicated clearly to the informants, both verbally and in writing.
2. IRB approval (see Appendix A) was obtained for this study prior to the start of any data collection.
3. Anonymity of all informants and their school was maintained.

Research Questions

The grand tour question asked by this study was: How do board members perceive their roles?

Data Collection Procedures

Setting. This study was conducted at an independent K-12 Christian school serving approximately 350 students in a Midwestern city. I believe this school is a good representative of other independent Christian schools. This school deals with challenges common to most schools of its kind. It is not eligible to receive tax dollars. Its budget is tuition based. There is no major church support. Balance must be achieved in setting the tuition so that it covers expenses but does not preclude all but the wealthy from attending. The school exists in a state that is known to have excellent public schools. This creates the challenge of attracting and keeping families who could receive a solid “free” public education. In order to become a viable choice for parents, this school and others like it often feel forced to invest in extra curricular activities including a sports program.

Most independent Christian schools that reside in the same state as this one seek at least “state approval” status from the state board of education. This school is a state accredited school which means that all the teachers and administrators hold valid certificates from the state of residence. These certificated employees would be paid considerably more if they worked in public schools. Paying wages that can compete with public education has always been a problem for these schools. In spite of these challenges and others, this particular school has been in existence for over 35 years.

Participants. All names used in the study are pseudonyms. The informants in this study were to be all nine board members who governed the school at the time of the study. However, the board president, Mr. Brown, was called out of town for an extended time and was unable to participate. The board members were elected by the parents of the school. Three of them had been appointed to “at large” positions by the elected board and then those appointments were approved by a vote of the parents. At the time data collection began, the head administrator of the school, Mr. Thomas, notified the board that he was leaving after four years in the position. At that time he agreed to be a part of the study. Mr. Thomas attended all the regular board meetings as the head administrator, but had no voting privileges. His perspective gave a distinctive view from that of the board members’. His perspective is offered when it further illuminates a topic. Besides Mr. Thomas, the participating board members are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants

Member Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Occupation	Years on Board	"At large" or Regular	Children In School
Mr. Baker	M	Mid 30's	Pastor	2	Regular	1
Ms. Clark	F	Mid 30's	Homemaker	First year	Regular	2
Mr. Evans	M	Late 40's	Accountant	5	Regular	1
Mr. Green	M	Mid 40's	Businessman	5	Regular	4
Mr. Johnson	M	Late 40's	Professor	First year	At large	0
Mr. Jones	M	Mid 30's	Maintenance Worker	First year	Regular	3
Mr. Smith	M	Mid 50's	Pastor	9	At large	0
Mr. White	M	Early 40's	Postal Worker	3	Regular	2

Methods. Data collection involved interviews. The perceptions of an individual are not subject to outside verification. The person is the only source of those perceptions. The initial interview was semi-structured and followed the interview protocol. Data collected in these interviews generated the questions to be pursued in the second interview (see Appendix B).

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions for Board Members

1. Why are you on this board?

Rationale:

I anticipated that the answers to this question would describe board members' motivation. Motivation and self-perception are closely linked. This is an important, foundational question. One's motivation for serving as a board member affects the perceptions of every aspect of the position.

2. How do you define your role on this board?
Is it the role you expected it to be?
If yes, in what ways is it what you expected?
If no, in what ways is it different?

Rationale:

Role definition is the core of this study. Its objective was to see the span of definitions held by the eight board members and the head administrator and to look for similarities and differences among them. Of particular interest were participants' answers in regard to policy setting. Research ranks policy setting as the most important role of a school board as a whole (Deuink & Herbster, 1986; Ramirez, 1995;

Schultz, 1998). The literature on policy setting by boards comes from both public and private schools.

3. What do you think are the characteristics of a high quality board member?

Rationale:

This question also elicited responses about self perception. The responses gave insight into the characteristics that members saw as necessary to fulfill the role of board member.

4. Of the various things you do as a board member, which do you consider to be the most important?
Did you consider these things the most important before you became a board member?
If not, how have your perceptions changed?

Rationale:

I anticipated that the answers to these questions would provide information on a board member's values and a glimpse of what he or she thought was most important. This information was compared with the answers that were given to questions 1-3 to see if there was consistency in responses.

5. How do you perceive your relationship with the school's head administrator?

Rationale:

The board supervises the school's head administrator. This question provided insight into the board member's sense of responsibility as both an individual and as part of the collective board in supervision. I anticipated that it was likely to reveal the level to which the board member felt a need to micro-manage. The expectations of the

administration and the board are crucial in maintaining a good working relationship

(Bryant & Grady, 1991).

6. Do you think you have changed personally in any way since becoming a board member?
If so, in what ways have you changed?
7. Have your views of schooling changed since you became a board member?
If so, in what ways have they changed?

Rationale:

These questions had to do with change. Over time and with the varied experiences of each board member, change is likely to occur in the person and in his or her views toward both the position as board member and in the school experience in general. Differentiating the initial perceptions from the evolving perceptions gave insight into the process involved in formulating the views of the individuals.

8. What is your view of the ideal relationship one board member might have with other board members?
If your actual relationship is different from that ideal, what do you think causes the gap between the ideal and the reality?

Rationale:

I anticipated that the answers to this question would provide a glimpse of the board members' sense of team relationships, any need for diverse perspectives, and notions of collective authority. The responses to this question demonstrated the motivation to lead. Whether there is a difference between the expectations of what the relationship between board members should be and what the relationships actually are became evident when answering this question. The answer to the follow-up question

provided insight into the perspectives of each board member as to why there should be a difference between reality and the original expectation.

9. What do you think is the most important issue facing this board?
Do you think the other individuals on the board would agree this is the most important issue?
Why or why not?

Rationale:

How a person defines an issue's importance describes his or her values.

Measures of whether these views are shared by others may offer insight into the board member's relationship with other members and what role, if any, he or she feels must be played in getting others to recognize the importance of a given issue. The most important issue may not be curricular or financial. It may be relational. Issues that face boards include but are not limited to: how a board sets sound policy (Streich, 1999), maintaining positive relationships with the head administrator (Bryant & Grady, 1991), communicating effectively with all constituents (Schultz, 1998), and avoiding practices that render a board ineffective (Kaufhold, 1997).

10. How would you describe the relationship between the board and the school's teachers?

Rationale:

I anticipated that the answers to this question would provide some sense of how a given board member sees the teachers, as professionals who should be involved in school decisions or as subordinate employees whose role is to carry out board policy.

11. How would you describe the relationship between the board and the school's parents?

Rationale:

This question revealed the board members' perceptions about the parents' role at the school. Since most board members were also parents, it also revealed to what extent the status and experience as a parent influenced his or her perceptions of the responsibilities of the parents and of the board members.

12. How prepared were you to assume the role of board member?

Rationale:

I anticipated that the answer to this question would provide a glimpse of the self-evaluation of board members' sense of preparedness. It also related to their motivation in becoming board members who are prepared for the job. Some board members may perceive training to be more important than others as a part of their preparation.

Data Recording Procedures

The interviews were audio taped. The tape recorder is the best record of the words of the participants, although careful note taking during the interviews was used as well (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Permission to tape record the conversations was obtained. Immediately after each interview, I did an analysis of my written notes. The written notes were coordinated with the content of the audio tapes.

Data Analysis

Data were collected and analyzed simultaneously. The heart of qualitative data analysis is category formation. By using descriptive detail in context, the researcher classifies and interprets the data (Creswell, 1998).

The constant comparison method of data analysis was used (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). That is, the results of the first interview with the first board member were recorded. Then the results of the first interview with the second board member were compared to the results from the first. Similarities and differences in answers were identified. Then the results of the first interview with the third board member were compared with the results from the interviews with both of the first two board members. Similarities and differences in answers were again identified. This process was repeated through all nine of the initial interviews.

Each new unit of meaning was chosen for analysis and then compared to other units of meaning and subsequently grouped with like units of meaning. This was accomplished by categorization and coding while collecting data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The categories and the coding were scrutinized on an ongoing basis to be assured of consistent, meaningful categories that represented the data effectively. Categories cannot be accurate and effective if they do not give a true understanding of the people and settings being studied (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

After what was the collection of rapidly expanding categories, the many categories were refined. This was done through the constant exploring of relationships and patterns among the various categories.

All along the process, I read and reread the collected data to become intimately familiar with it all. During this phase, I began to "clean up" (Pearsol, 1985) the mounds of data. Member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) of the categories by various participants were done as a method of enhancing clear and concise meaning.

As the initial data were collected and I began the analysis process, some of the headings that came from the interview questions and from the categories in the review of the literature formed the starting point of independent categories. Some of the headings seemed to be related enough to combine under a new heading which included the attributes of both. New categories emerged that were related to, but did not seem to be a part of previous categories. Analysis of the data after the first two interviews produced a list of ten potential categories. This list of categories appears in Table 2.

From early in the clustering process it was obvious that the individual's and the collective board's role were intertwined within every other category. The boards of many Christian schools have a tendency to be involved with the administration of the school instead of sticking to their primary role of policy setting (Schultz, 1998). This school board also had the tendency to cross certain administrative boundaries. Because the purpose of the study was to explore the board members' perceived roles, it soon became obvious that "role" was a thread running through and permeating every other category.

The categories that emerged, however, described areas of board members' concern and action. They did not specifically address how the participants perceived their roles. Rather, the board members' perceptions were embedded in their descriptions and discussions of how they reacted to certain events, issues, and feelings. The task became to draw the self-perception from the self-reported attitude or behavior.

Table 2

Initial Set of General Categories Influencing Members' Role Perceptions

1. Motivation	How and why they serve
2. Last year vs. This year	A pivotal time
3. Issues	Important issues
4. Changes	Significant changes
5. Progress	Significant progress
6. Role	Individual and collective roles
7. Preparation	Necessary training
8. Relationships	Quality of relationships
9. Communication	Effective communication
10. Administrator's view	Consistency with other views

Another category that emerged as one that should be narrowed considerably was the viewpoint of the administrator. Adding the administrator as participant gave a balanced look at some of the aspects found in other categories. Just as Bryant and Grady (1991) found the board/administrator relationship to be important, the data supported its importance. I evaluated the administrator's perceptions of this relationship and I made a note to collapse the data from the category of "Administrator's View" into other categories, where appropriate.

The heading "Communication" did not stand alone past the first two interviews. Communication was involved in every other category as well. The data which dealt with communication issues included communication among several groups and individuals on many topics. This is in line with evidence produced by Adelman and Taylor (1998) who found effective communication at the board level challenging because of the many participants and topics.

By the end of the first round of interviews the categories had been reconfigured and consolidated. The refined list of categories appears in Table 3.

Comparisons continued to be made and categories were reconstructed. With completion of the remaining interviews, a final reassessment and reduction were conducted. The "Motivation" category contained enough data that were distinct enough to form two separate categories: "A Calling" and "We Make a Difference"

The significant amount of data dealing with perceptions pertaining to "Last year vs. This year" expanded into a category which dealt with the issues of the particular

Table 3

Revised Set of General Categories Influencing Members' Role Perceptions

1. Motivation
2. Last year vs. This year
3. Issues
4. Changes
5. Progress
6. Preparation
8. Relationships

time period in which the board had been operating at the time of the study. The issue of “timing” had impacted the perceptions of the board members toward their roles.

The new category which emerged was “The Times”. Much of the data from the categories of “Changes” and “Progress” was compared with data in both “The Times” and “Issues” and then reduced and folded into those categories.

The category “Preparation” was moved to the end, but remained in tact. The data indicated that this stood as a separate category. The amount and type of training provided impacted the board members’ perceptions of their roles. This supported the findings of Grady and Krumm (1998) on the importance of training for board members.

The idea of “Relationships” being a separate category continued to be supported by the data. But it also was a concept that was woven throughout the board members’ perceptions and into other categories. The heading did not seem to be distinct by itself, but the underlying theme of these relationships seemed to be “Accessibility.” The board members were very accessible as individuals and as a board because of the unique situation in which they served. The final revised list of categories and the properties that make them up is shown in Table 4.

The last step in the method was to draw role perceptions out of each of the descriptive categories. Re-reading the material associated with each category, I identified the role perceptions listed in Table 5. Once the role perceptions were extracted, only their order of presentation changed in the interest of clarity.

Table 4

Final Categories Influencing Members' Role Perceptions**Category One: A Calling****Properties:**

- A. Passion for God
- B. Passion for Christian education
- C. Passion to serve

Category Two: We Make a Difference**Properties:**

- A. Contributions
- B. Expertise

Category Three: The Times**Properties:**

- A. The cycle
- B. Last year
- C. This year
- D. Next year

Category Four: Issues**Properties**

- A. The search
- B. Finances

C. Public Relations

D. Mind our own business

Category Five: Accessibility

Properties:

A. Relationship with each other

B. Relationship with the administrator

C. Relationship with the teachers

D. Relationship with the parents

Category Six: Preparation

Properties:

A. Background

B. Read the directions

C. Special training

D. On the job training

Table 5

Role Perceptions Drawn from Descriptive Categories

Category	Role Perception
A Calling	My Role is to Respond to the Call My Role is to be an Advocate for Christian Education My Role is to Make a Unique and Positive Difference
Operational Issues	My Role is to be a Student of Board Basics My Role is to be a Policy Maker—And Perhaps More My Role is to Evaluate the Administrator My Role is to Select Quality Leadership Personnel My Role is to be a Fund Raiser and Financial Controller
Relationships	My Role is to Maintain Positive Relationships with the Teachers My Role is to Maintain Positive Relationships with the Parents My Role is to be a Peacemaker on the Board
Planning	My Role is to Plan for the Future

Verification

The idea of validity in qualitative research refers to its credibility and correctness as it applies to a conclusion or interpretation of data (Maxwell, 1996).

The validity referred to here is defined as representing the participants' viewpoints of reality in a credible manner (Schwandt, 1997). The goal in qualitative research is trustworthiness (Guba, 1981).

Member checks were done with the informants to assure credibility and trustworthiness. After each interview, the answers were typed out verbatim and sent back to the subject for confirmation. I was involved with all phases of the study and was on guard against bias while fulfilling my role.

Reporting of the Findings

This study is reported in the form of a doctoral dissertation. The results provide insight into a subject previously unexplored. The data have been summarized and are presented through thick description that deals with the board members' perceptions and my interpretations of them. The report is divided into sections that are separated into the broad categories which are the actual role perceptions that come from the analysis of the interviews. Within these broad categories are subcategories that illuminate the perceptions of the various informants. Each of the resulting categories was examined in the light of available literature. The recommendations for research and practice are also identified.

CHAPTER 4

Presentation of Findings

This exploratory qualitative study examined how eight school board members at an independent Christian school perceived their roles. The purpose was to better understand a specific kind of school board and its function as perceived by its members. The central or grand-tour question was: How do board members perceive their roles?

The Sources of the Findings

The informants were eight members of an independent Christian school board. All members of the board participated with the exception of the president who was called away on business for most of the study. Shortly after the interviews began, it became common knowledge that the head administrator was leaving his position. Because being a part of the study could no longer impact the status of his employment at the school, he was invited to participate in order to collect data specific to his viewpoint as the head administrator.

The participants were interviewed twice, the first time in December and January, then again later in April and May. The questions for the first interview originated from the review of literature. The first interview protocol contained 12 questions. Many of the same questions were asked in the second interview, but additional questions were employed to clarify data gathered in the first interviews (see Appendix B).

Presentation of the Findings

Interview Integration

Data from the two interviews were integrated and coded into categories that emerged during analysis. Because this was an exploratory study of individual perceptions, the findings were categorized into recurring themes which, after further analysis, led to the role perceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). It was very difficult for the board members to separate their perceptions of the board's role from their individual roles, and so both perspectives are shared.

Reporting Pattern

Each section below begins with an identified role perception. This is followed by evidence that supports that identification. Following each role perception is a summary of the implications of that particular perception.

Perceptions

Perception 1: My Role is to Respond to the Call

The dominant theme in the board members' comments was the perception that they had been "called" to serve others in fulfilling the position of board member. Repeatedly, the message was that the job required more of them than they had ever anticipated. This perception of the role as a calling resulted in each one of them expressing passion for the job — a passion that grew out of a dual passion for God and a passion to serve. They were passionate about their faith, about their school, and about using their particular gifts and talents to serve. Their desire to serve others sprang naturally from their faith. The dedication to Christian education is rooted in the

fact that one of the goals of Christian schools is to share the truth of God. Therefore, these board members fulfilled their need to serve others by serving this particular Christian school. They hoped the school would help spread passion for God. These passions were very much intertwined and very much influenced both their individual and collective perceptions.

Passion for God. They shared the opinion that the spiritual dimension is necessary. “One has to have passion—for the Lord and for Christian education,” was how Mr. Johnson put it. Five of them also mentioned that it is necessary to be “grounded in the Word of God” in order to serve well. There was unanimous agreement that the Christian school fills a very specific purpose which includes emphasizing the Christian faith. Therefore, the spiritual dimension of board membership was mentioned at or near the top of every participant’s response to the question on the characteristics of an effective board member.

Every board member expressed a devotion to God. Mr. White described his relationship with God as “secure.” He felt that out of that relationship the call to serve God by serving on the board was only natural. Mr. Jones felt he has gifts given by God, and that those should be used as a board member. He also believed that from his relationship with God came the core values he brought to the board: “I think that I am honest and loyal to the Bible and what it stands for, and I stand up for that.” Mr. Evans brought his core values “from the Word of God” with him to the role of board member, too: “If I was not willing to stand up for those core values, I would give in to the wrong things as a board member.”

A passion to serve. A calling could also be demonstrated by the willingness to serve in the first place. Pastor Baker explained that for board members in general, “Serving means not pushing a personal agenda, but rather listening and deciding issues on the basis of what is best for the school.”

As a busy dad of young children, Pastor Baker “did not need any more meetings” in his life. He felt called to serve the school as a whole, but more specifically the teachers. He tried to represent their interests whenever possible. He saw problems at the school and decided to become “a part of the solution.”

“You have to be willing to be involved — not thinking that you have to do this because nobody else will do it,” was how Mr. White put it. He also added, “There has to be a real willingness in order to be able to accept the criticism that is sure to come to a person in the position of board member.” Mr. White mentioned the fact that when he was considering serving on the board his son reminded him that he always told his children to “get involved.” Being a good role model to his children was part of his motivation to serve.

When first elected to the board, Mr. Jones saw serving as a way to impact the education of his own children. After serving on the board for a year, he came to understand he was serving many others as well.

Summary

Each board member felt a passion about God and service and that his or her role was to respond to the call to serve. This was the most widely shared perception

among the board members. While the exact nature of the call varied from member to member, the call was clearly felt and generated a passionate response.

Perception 2: My Role is to Be an Advocate for Christian Education

The board members universally believed in education — more specifically, Christian education. To them the difference was the added dimension that exemplifies Christian education. It is not just “regular” education with the addition of a class that teaches Biblical concepts. These board members believed that a school that is Christian should have excellence in academics as well as in all the other programs it offers. The Christian world view found in the pages of the Bible should be found in all that is taught in each classroom by teachers who share that world view. Every member felt that one must believe in and have a passion for Christian education in order to be an effective board member at such a school.

As Mr. Evans said, “Boards should not only want to provide Christian education, but excellent Christian education. They should not be willing to settle for just a Bible class, but for an excellent Christian education in all classes.” All participants shared the idea that Christian education is an education informed by and infused with higher standards. Evans also stressed the importance of being dedicated to the specific school at which a member serves. All but one of them were parents of students in attendance, so they naturally seemed to feel that dedication.

Each individual board member valued Christian education. The desire to see Christian education succeed influenced each member’s approach to his or her position on the board.

Mr. Evans “has a heart” for the school and what it represents. That is why he is willing to give the long hours required to do the job. Even more important to him is Christian education in general. He said, “I am on the board because I am committed to Christian education.” Mr. Green thought serving as a board member was an excellent way for him to “show support” for Christian education. Ms. Clark believes in education, but more specifically in “the kind of education this school represents.” She expressed, “I have a great desire to see this school succeed and Christian education to be stronger in general for the children who desire to have it.”

Summary

Again, a pervasive perception shared across board members was that their role was to be an advocate for Christian education. Three board members saw advocacy as going outside the school setting to the larger community. All saw that their responsibility went beyond providing a solid academic experience for students with an additional Christian dimension as an addendum. Rather, they perceived advocacy as infusing Christian values in all parts of the school experience.

Perception 3: My Role is to Make a Unique and Positive Difference.

All of the board members viewed serving on the school board as more than just making policy decisions. They perceived that a board member could make a difference that affected the lives of the staff, students, families, and even the larger community.

All of the board members knew that boards make a difference. “The realization that we are dealing with 300-350+ students and the decisions we make affect their lives

— that has brought much more seriousness to performing as a school board,” was how Pastor Smith put it. He regarded it as a “sacred responsibility.”

Veteran board members intently felt the responsibility to contribute. Mr. White believed that members should be sure that they are in the place where each of them can best contribute to the good of the board and the school as a whole. Long time board member, Pastor Smith, the board vice president, had to step into a void left by the president to fulfill his role. He said, “My role has changed this year. The president is out of town for three months. I am much more active now. I have taken the forefront in the administrator search.” Pastor Smith felt he had contributed a great deal to the board in his nine years of service. Heading the Search Committee would be his last major contribution, and he thought it would be one of lasting significance.

The members new to the board were also starting to receive satisfaction from fulfilling their role. Following the example of the veteran members, they felt the same responsibility to contribute. New member Professor Johnson shared, “I think I am starting to make a difference on the board. After that initial time of being new, I can think of two issues lately where I pushed my position, one was with budget and one was an educational issue that was very important. The longer you are on the board, the more comfortable you are fortifying your positions.”

Mr. Jones had used his maintenance expertise on the aging school building.

Because the previous board member on the Facilities Committee left the board, I was dropped into that spot. That is where my strengths are. I do put my two cents in on the search for a new administrator and the other issues that have been important this year.

The members accepted the idea that they are on the board for the specific expertise they brought, that was usually the way each contributed to the decisions made — from his or her area of expertise.

Because this board valued matching specific strengths with specific needs, the board members seemed to make the most of their contributions in what they perceived to be their areas of strength. Mr. Evans, a CPA by profession, was elected the treasurer of the board six years ago and had been made very aware of his contributions to the board. He cited one contribution this way, "From '98 till now — we are just now getting to where we are not spending next year's registration on this year's expenses." He is the one deferred to on all financial issues, and he has led the school in building a more solid financial footing.

When the members sought nominees, they kept in mind areas in which there was a need for a specific area of expertise from an individual. Over and over, the selection of Mr. Evans as the treasurer of the board was singled out as the best example of a board member's expertise benefiting the board. There have been other obvious attempts to seek educational expertise from a professor at a college of education, and building maintenance expertise from the head of a maintenance department in the private sector. Also, a new member was added who has experience in public relations to help with school development. A real effort had been made to fill every vacancy with someone whose strength is in that area.

As the businessman, Mr. Green, put it, "What I have been asked to do on the board has actually helped me at my business, and my business background has certainly

helped the board. I brought the business background with me, but I have learned a lot by using it on the board.”

One of the newer members, Ms. Clark, felt that she brought “the perspective of a business person and past educator. I think the school should be run like a school AND a business. I remind the board of that.”

Professor Johnson thought his job on the board had been predetermined for him and it fit him well, particularly sharing research on curriculum issues. “My role was already defined. I head the committee for curriculum review. I have been involved with educational and curriculum issues and that is what I expected to be involved with.”

Mr. White was about to resign from the Development Committee, and he was about to be reassigned to the building committee, an area in which he felt he had more expertise. “That is more my strength. I have a background in construction. I know more what I am talking about. It is a place I can better serve and be more confident in.”

Other board members thought they had specific areas of expertise that the board expected them to use, although some were less defined than others, such as the spiritual oversight provided by the two pastors. One of those pastors, Pastor Baker, had been a classroom teacher at the school years before, which he felt gave him insight into how the classroom impacts policy. He felt that part of the way he had made a contribution had been to “support and encourage teachers and the administration through tough times and to point out things from their perspective on this board.”

Pastor Baker was encouraged to have successful people from the business community on the board. He was "relieved" that someone like Mr. Evans was in charge of budget and finances.

The board's decisions were influenced by the various members in a variety of ways. At times, the expertise desired by the board was obvious, as in the case Mr. Evans becoming the treasurer. At other times, even those members without specific expertise were utilizing their gifts in areas such as human relations.

Mr. White, a new member who was getting more comfortable with how things were done, felt that he contributed to quality decision making by asking the questions that "Joe Average Guy" would ask. "I'm just an average working guy, and I see myself as the guy who represents the majority of the people there," he said.

Three board members mentioned that effective board members were not only experts in a field but were also successful in their various endeavors. Success was valued in other areas of life as well. Mr. Evans, the treasurer of the board, summed up the thought this way: "You need people who are successful in life, the ones that have done things and are energetic to do more. If you want to get things done, ask a busy person because they get stuff done." Pastor Smith said, "It has really helped us to get people that are successful and have professional expertise. It takes an analysis to see who is a good fit." He believed that that analysis should be done by the current board members.

One of the most important decisions of this school year was the choosing of a new head administrator. Pastor Smith contributed heavily to that decision because he had served as a teacher with one of the candidates at another school several years ago.

I believe that the place I have had the most part in making a difference this year has been in the administrative search because I know the man that we ended up choosing. I was able to say that the things he talked about were exactly what he did, in my experience.

A concern voiced by four members was the fact that there was not a large enough pool of potential board members from which to choose. The interest in the job from the parent body was not overwhelming. There were enough candidates to have an election, but not many seeking election. The lack of interest in the job was a concern these board members had for the board's future. These members believed it was their job to find the right match between board need and candidate expertise. They believed that would be more challenging in the future.

Summary

Each board member perceived his or her role to include making a unique positive contribution to the school and its operation. These individualized perceptions offered the school a fairly wide range of expertise on which to draw, but, at the same time, produced potential for board member conflict as differing perspectives created differing priorities. While each board member perceived a need to push his or her own agenda, each also recognized the need for the board to achieve consensus before it could act and allocate human and financial resources. Perceiving a need to make an individual contribution also increased the potential for conflict among board members

and with the administrator because it caused several board members to see roles for themselves that went beyond policy making.

Perception 4: My Role is to be a Student of Board Basics

The board believed that part of its role was to learn how boards operate and how board members should behave. However, the board members felt that reading the manuals and documents of the school combined with the on-the-job training that was provided was sufficient for them to be effective in their roles. Their perception of their role as students of board basics did not extend to formal board training.

Of all the board members, Professor Johnson seemed to feel the most prepared for the position he accepted as board member. He had experience teaching at the K-12 level, serving as an administrator at a school similar to this one, and teaching education classes at the college level. The rest of the board members had had various levels of preparation for their role. The question of how one could prepare for such a position in the first place was overshadowed by the question of when that could happen. The time required to serve on the board was considered significant, taking time to prepare for that service seemed very challenging indeed.

The board members had discussed formal board training. They felt the training provided by ACSI would be the best choice. But the only commitment made to formal training was a verbal one. The board members never did attend formal board training. Because of budget and time constraints, they did not think this training was attainable at the time this study was conducted.

Mr. White said, "We have been talking about some ACSI board training conferences. The problem with that is everybody is so busy. With home, work, and the regular board work, when are you going to set up more time for training?"

Professor Johnson was of the opinion that the training provided by ACSI for boards is the best kind.

It would be great to send us to an ACSI board training seminar. But with our budget you would have to tell each one this is what you need to do, but you need to pay for it yourself and find the time to do it. It's hard enough to get board members without adding that requirement.

Other special training. The board had considered many options for providing additional training for board members. Since they consistently refused formal board training from ACSI, they discussed the need for a board retreat to be held each year. There have been retreats in years past, but they have not been consistently held.

The board members shared that the administrator had encouraged formal board training and regular board retreats. This contributed to more under-the-surface tension between the board and the administrator. It also was an example of more mixed messages; all the board members admitted the need for training, but did not prioritize the time or money to receive it.

Background. The board members had the dangerous notion that coming to the board with the "right background" was beneficial and could lessen the need for training. But determining the right background for a board member was challenging. "Other than having board members who are all educators, it is difficult to have a board

that fully understands educational issues. But then there would be something else they are lacking in what we need as a board, so that is not the answer,” ventured Mr. Evans.

Pastor Baker felt he did not have to spend much time learning the way things worked at the school because he had once been employed there as a teacher. Ms. Clark also had been a teacher (though not at this school) before becoming a business person and had attended a different independent Christian school as a student while growing up. The rest believed that their role as parents gave them an understanding of issues, but most soon realized that that sort of background was not enough. Mr. Evans said, “I had a simplified view of the educational process as a parent. I have a new appreciation of how education is structured now.” Mr. Green said he came on the board with a basic premise, “teach kids,” but he found, “There is a whole lot of stuff that goes on in addition to that, and I had no idea. No matter how long you are a parent, it does not prepare you to be on the school board. I’m not exactly sure how you prepare for it.” Whatever the background of the board member, they agreed that in performing their roles they needed to bring strengths for the job with them and then they needed to be trained in some way, preferably by the training procedures already in place. However, none of their experiences address board member roles or responsibilities.

Read the directions. This board had a lot of reading material at its disposal. When board members are elected they are given thick manuals for the job. There also are suggested reading lists which include basic rules for conducting board business.

The manuals were considered the main form of training for the board. All this reading received mixed reviews from the members.

The required reading list for the board members was lengthy. Most had not read it all, and to all but two board members, it seemed impossible to do so. Yet they expressed the belief that reading all of the material would benefit them and should be a part of the job of board member. Mr. Jones stated, "The board manual is very thick. Within that there are suggested books to read, too. To be honest, I don't think it was all that helpful to me. Asking questions helped me more." Mr. White said, "You have to be very familiar with the policy manual so that when the time comes to make a decision on something, you don't have to go back and question where we stand on this." He continued, "One thing about our school — everything is written down in black and white. There is nothing left to guess."

The longest serving members had an advantage, having had more time to read. Those veterans played a resource role with some other members. One of those veterans, Pastor Smith, mentioned other reading as well, sharing that the members have to be very familiar with the school's mission statement, the Statement of Faith, as well as all of the policies. He said,

For example, I was asked by a new board member once, "When a faculty or staff person is hired, do they have to agree totally with the Statement of Faith?" I asked them what the policy said about that and told them where to find it. When they read the manual, it answered lots of their questions.

Pastor Smith often reminded the board about the necessity of reading what was already provided, especially concentrating on the most important issues. To Pastor Smith, the

most crucial type of reading material for them to be effective in their roles was material containing the philosophy of Christian education. With so many members with a business point of view, he felt that understanding the basic tenants of Christian education would give them all a foundational understanding of the type of school they served. In my experience, this is not an uncommon lament of Christian school board members and administrators about their boards – that some members lack a basic understanding of the philosophy of Christian education.

Mr. Evans agreed with the value of having policies in place.

I am grateful for the people who have taken the time to write the policies for this school. Part of the reason that we have been able to get through some of the things that we have gone through is because we have had it in writing. It has helped; it really has.

On-the-job training. The principle method of training of newly elected members is “on the job.” The new members are elected after the first of the calendar year. They are expected to start coming to meetings but are not eligible to vote on issues until the summer when the members they are replacing leave the board.

The two board members elected for next year began attending meetings in February. That gave the board members a chance to see their strengths and answer their questions. Pastor Smith and Mr. Evans thought the questions had been good ones and they were impressed with the new members. That seemed to be the consensus of the board members. They thought the new members brought the right skills and strengths at the right time. Mr. Green found it tiring sometimes when a question was

asked, and it seemed like they were going over old ground; but he also thought, "It's good for the rest of us, too."

When the new members were asked about their recent experience with this on-the-job-training, they expressed the opinion that it had been helpful to them in preparing for their roles as board members. Ms. Clark felt it did not take her long to start contributing to the board because she was familiar with this type of board, and she had the opportunity to attend the board meetings before actually becoming a full fledged member. She merely asked the questions she needed to ask and then expressed her opinions where and when she thought appropriate. Pastor Johnson found the early months illuminating and helpful for getting "up to speed" for the time he would be a voting member. Mr. Jones felt he received much more from his observations and questions at meetings than he did from any reading he did of policy manuals. He said,

Just walking in cold in July would be really hard. I sat in on committee meetings, too. I would go in with one of the guys already on the Building and Grounds Committee. They wanted me to take his place when he left. I asked lots of questions, and it brought me up to speed.

Summary

The board members saw themselves as prepared by prior experience. They saw themselves as capable of learning on the job, and they perceived that as their role and responsibility.

They did not perceive a need for formal training despite admitting that they felt role conflict in several areas. Even though two accreditation teams had criticized their micromanagement, they still avoided formal board training. Other role perceptions

such as the contributions they make from their areas of expertise dominated so they could justify their view that they did not have the time or money to take formal training.

Perception 5: My Role is to be a Policy Maker – And Perhaps More

This role perception was the most mixed among the participants. It caused conflict both within and between individual members. For some, policy making represented what they saw as the limit of their legitimate involvement in school operation. Among those, however, were some who felt themselves irresistibly drawn into the school's day-to-day administration because of their competing role definitions of parent or expert. Still others simply perceived their role as a calling for them to take an active part in implementing and monitoring the policies they created. Some were not content to be just policy makers. Finally, some thought that the depth of their hands-on involvement depended on variations in the competence of the school's administrator.

At first it seemed surprising that all the board members, even the new ones, knew and readily acknowledged that there had been some problems in the past in determining and then sticking to the proper role for a school board. But it was an issue they had discussed and dealt with for a long time.

Policy making role. All said they believed the proper board role was policy making. Pastor Baker said that the board "should set the direction and let the administrator administrate — do his job." He also thought there might be progress in this area, "We were just dealing with something the other night, and someone said that

the administration should handle it, and we let it drop. We didn't know why we were handling it in the first place." Ms. Clark saw the need for a board with a vision as well and a board that is thinking beyond the day-to-day operation of the school.

Each board member saw improvement in the matter of engaging in less micromanagement as time had passed. However, that observation may not be accurate. This effort to stay out of administration would be tested by an unknown variable looming on the horizon. In light of the fact that there would be a new administrator, four board members thought it would be a challenge to let him operate the school without their "help," two did not think it would be difficult to get out of administration, and two thought the board's help would be needed for at least the first year. Obviously, several of the individuals were reluctant to categorically give up school administration.

Sometimes, because of a lack of experience, board members had not fully developed their perspective on policy setting. As a new member, the policy setting issue has been an interesting one for Mr. Jones. "When I first came on I thought, 'Well, the school has been established long enough, there probably is enough policy.' But even today there are policies that have to be put in place for new problems and new issues. I have been made aware of how policy changes and new policy is needed." As far as his input into the policies with which the board was dealing, he felt he was a "conservative" voice. He said, "I feel like it is a balancing act. There are some that you would not call conservative, and I feel I can give balance to those viewpoints when we discuss policy issues."

The extent to which the members believed that they strayed from that role and entered into administration varied among the individuals, as did the opinion as to whether it was still occurring significantly – and to what extent it should continue. What some members saw as proper assistance to give to an administrator, others saw as micro-managing.

Beyond policy making. Board members were not hesitant to acknowledge past involvement in administration, and not all thought it to be a problem. Four of them thought it was an appropriate role for the board to play at times. They had the sense that this board had discovered a “better way” not embraced by conventional thought. That better way included helping the administrator with daily operations when the board felt it was necessary.

This “better way” was suspect. The board had been cited by at least two accreditation teams over the years for being over-involved administratively. This issue had been discussed by the board in the past as well as for the new members’ benefit. Therefore, the proper role of a board was something upon which they had all reflected at one time or another. Mr. Green put it this way:

I think our board has a problem with getting out of the operating and into a higher level. I think that is our biggest issue. I don’t want to go so far as to say that we need a vision, but at least we have to get out of the daily operation. Not that we are in it totally, but it seems like we tend to fight fires and it is hard to get back to a higher level board.

In theory, the board members expressed what they believed to be proper roles for the administrator and board. In practice, the proper roles were not always observed. What they espoused as their role was not what they always practiced.

The board members were confused about whether and – if so -- how to consistently stay out of school administration. Role ambiguity was rampant. Though confused, the members expressed a desire and reported some progress in moving away from all things administrative. The board members perceived it to be their job to move the board in the general direction of policy setting – but four of them simply could not let go of a larger role. The members were divided on the overall board's role in relation to the administrator's role.

Competing role definitions. Three individuals reported role conflict was caused by the clash of the role of board member and other roles. For example, Mr. White thought it was important being the parent of a student, but realized that it also made it more difficult for him to stay out of the day-to-day issues. The parent role could drive him beyond the policy role and cause him to intervene as a parent. He perceived his role to include representing many others. "I try to see myself as representing the majority of the people there, not just myself. That brings me back to the good of the school as a whole."

In addition to setting policy, Pastor Smith perceived one of his individual roles on the board was to be the school's "spiritual thermometer" for the nine years he had served. He was concerned about that role being vacant because his service was drawing to a close. It was obvious that this role influenced his approach to policy setting.

I give a pastor's input. I try to make sure we maintain not only the philosophy of the school, but the standards, too. I am willing to stand up for the dress code or for other policy that students may violate.

Are we going to back down because of the parents? Or are we going to maintain the standard?

Interestingly, Pastor Smith, who had been on the board during past years of “administrative help,” and was serving as the acting president, did not feel the board needed to be out of the day-to-day operation of the school completely. “I would like to see cooperation with the administrator, where we work WITH the administrator. I don’t think that the board should be distanced from the day-to-day operation totally. How do you make wise decisions if you don’t have contact with faculty?” Pastor Smith perceived it part of his role to communicate directly with parents and staff in his efforts to gauge the spiritual climate. He did not necessarily see the need to have these communications go through the administrator.

Mr. Jones agreed, although he put something of a time limit to his involvement, “I think that next year we will have more involvement while the new administrator is getting used to it. I see us getting things done with him until he gets comfortable.”

Administrator competence. All of them believed that what evolves in this area will depend in large part on the next administrator. The individuals all had what they thought to be the right answer to the big question about their role -- the board’s role is to set policy.

At least four of the board members felt that their role would be determined by the person they chose for the administrative position. If the board felt the administrator was not able to handle the daily operation of the school, then the board would have to help. “Our role next year will depend on the man or the woman in the position of

administrator — what the strengths are,” said Mr. Evans. Professor Johnson was more emphatic about a role change being necessary.

Yes, the board’s role needs to change for next year. It will be based on the person who serves as the head administrator. If he is a strong leader and a good communicator and informs the board of what the board needs to know, I am thinking the board can go back and talk about policy issues and move out of the administration side—act how a board is supposed to act.

Pastor Baker hoped that the person would not bring many issues to the board in the first place. Mr. Evans believed that when the board hires someone, it has to be able to trust him or her even if it takes a little time to establish that trust. Mr. White thought that there was a time when the board had to be in the operation side of things. He was specifically referring to the crisis situation which occurred the previous year, but he said, “I don’t think we want to be in that area. We are weaning ourselves from that. As the board changes, that will be even more so.” The proper role this specific board ought to be playing was an ongoing issue with many questions still left unanswered.

Summary

The board members unanimously thought they were on the way to decreasing role confusion by dealing only with policy setting. None of them claimed to be perfect at this yet because it was a new role for them – carefully considering whether an issue merited board attention before discussing it. All of them were encouraged by the progress they were making in ending role confusion.

Even though there was positive energy being created by an administrative change, four board members were not willing to unequivocally quit the administrative role. To them, the administrative change meant that the board might be forced to play a role in administration because of a perceived need born out of a sense of duty.

Perception 6: My Role is to Select Quality Leadership Personnel

As in any organization, leadership is a vital quality. Each of the board members perceived it a part of his or her role to take an active part in defining specific leadership qualities necessary in a Christian school leader and then to assume an active role in selecting a person who possessed those characteristics.

Soon after the second semester began, Mr. Thomas, the school's administrator, informed the board that he would not be returning next year. The role of choosing the next administrator was perceived to be one of the most important by all of the board members.

The board formed a search committee headed by the vice president, Pastor Smith. The board members perceived that they were charged with finding the next administrator and that the authority to do so rested with them alone. They did not perceive it important to involve the current administrator or the faculty in choosing the next administrator.

The first thing the committee did was to come up with the qualifications required for the new administrator. The criteria gave insight into what the committee members perceived to be the most important characteristics of the next administrator. Ms. Clark shared the three general criteria that were the most important to the Search

Committee and later adopted by the full board. "The first characteristic we are looking for has to do with spiritual maturity and godliness, followed by the necessary professional qualifications with all the necessary credentials, and after that we will look at the specific skills needed to fit this particular school," Mr. Clark said.

Some of those "specific skills" mentioned by the Search Committee were spelled out by three board members. "We need someone who supervises the school and teachers well," was a priority to Pastor Baker. Mr. White, the parent of a high school student, felt that the current administrator related better to the elementary aged child and hoped the next one understood high school students better. "The high school needs an administrator who will include the kids so that the kids really see the school as their school, not just the board's or parents' school," he said. Professor Johnson found the current administrator "reactionary" and he felt that "better leadership skills" were needed by the next person in the job. The professor also had the impression that the teachers had not experienced enough administrative oversight saying, "I've heard that there has never been a negative thing in any teacher evaluation. If that is true, then they are an extremely good staff — maybe a miraculous staff." Two other board members focused more on the impression an administrator makes even beyond the school. "He will be a figurehead of our school," said Mr. Green, "so he needs to represent the school well. That is very important." Mr. Evans felt that the most important skill was communication: "It is constant communication with teachers, parents, kids, the board and others. Communication is critical and everything flows down from there. A good communicator will make that job shine." The members'

perceived role was to identify the specific skills needed in the next administrator and then find the person who possessed those skills.

Summary

While the board members shared the perception that quality leadership was vital to school success, they each had different perceptions of which leadership characteristic was most salient in given circumstances. This became a pattern in this board's interactions. They had agreement on a macro-level concept, but differing perceptions of the elements and the priorities of those elements within the larger context. They agreed that strong leadership was essential, but each focused on a different aspect of leadership as a priority. Some, such as Professor Johnson, perceived their role as helping to ensure that the new administrator possessed quality leadership behavior, as evidenced in his observation that no teacher had received negative evaluations under the previous administrator.

Perception 7: My Role is to Evaluate the Administrator

Whether they felt they should intervene in administration or not, they all perceived it their duty to evaluate the administrator. But they had varying conceptions of what constituted an appropriate evaluation. Some of the confusion resulted from simple ignorance of a board's role and a lack of training. But some of the confusion was a result of some board members' personal relationships with the administrator. At this school, where all but one board member had children in attendance at one time, the administrator and board members had numerous occasions to interact. The depth of knowledge possessed by the board members about the administrator was vast. It is

within this role perception that the administrator's viewpoint seemed most relevant. From the board members' responses when talking about Mr. Thomas, it was obvious that they did not perceive there to be the tension in the relationship that Mr. Thomas perceived.

Only two of the board members reflected on their personal relationship with the administrator. Pastor Baker worked with Mr. Thomas when they both taught at the school. He considered him a friend, and he felt his role was to be an advocate for the administrator whenever possible. "I have known him for a long time. So I think my relationship with him is kind of as his peer. I am able to say certain things to him. But I mostly try to encourage him. I may tell him to be careful in certain situations."

Mr. White, like most of the board members, expressed his appreciation of Mr. Thomas' pleasant demeanor. He felt it was his role to ask the tough questions and gain understanding that could only be provided by Mr. Thomas. "I'm not afraid to ask him questions. I can confront him, and I can ask him anything. We get along fine; he is a nice guy," he stated.

The current administrator had served the school for four years. Before that he had been a teacher at the school for nine years. His own children had graduated from the school, and he felt he had a significant "investment" in making the school what it is today. When he announced he was leaving, both he and the board members were willing to reflect on his tenure and the relationship that had developed between him and the board.

Mr. Thomas thought the most important aspect of his relationship with the board was that of loyalty, a loyalty that goes both ways. He also thought the board should be able to be his confidante in certain matters. He believed for the most part that he had had that loyalty and confidence from this board. "There are times I have been disappointed and I have been hurt. There have been areas where I have not felt like I have been trusted." But with "90%" of the board members he thought he had maintained a good relationship.

In the spring, Mr. Thomas was awaiting an evaluation of his job performance from the board for the current school year. They had at first declined to do one because he was leaving. Getting the board to fulfill the role of evaluator had always been a challenge for him. The board members perceived it their responsibility to evaluate the administrator, but they did not perceive that the evaluation necessarily had to be either public or formal. Mr. Thomas pushed the issue and they agreed to complete a formal evaluation. He did not agree with some of the comments made on the previous year's evaluation. "It was unacceptable. Some of the questions that were asked, they had no idea because there was no observation going on. They may have known what people said, but they did not know the answers first hand." Mr. Thomas felt that the board needed an administrator evaluation procedure in place based on verifiable, observable data.

We went totally haywire last year with the president. He got into the position of not trusting me at all, and they allowed him to remain on the board until he stepped down. To me, when any parent, especially

a board member, publicly states they have serious problems with the administrator, they {parent or board member} should be dismissed from the school.

It was obvious that the board members felt it was their role to maintain a positive relationship with the administrator, and that they had done so, even in less than perfect circumstances. "I think the board's relationship with this administrator is good overall," summed up Professor Johnson, "but I'd say there is an edginess under the surface." Having been on the board for a long time, Pastor Smith compared this administrator with the previous one, "With the one before our current one there were some issues that came up which the board had to deal with, and we have not had those problems with this one. I think it has been a wonderful working relationship with the current administrator."

By the time of the second round of interviews, there were some subtle changes in the relationships. The board members believed that as things wound down in the relationship with Mr. Thomas, it was their role to end on a positive note. The board members knew that could be a challenge if Mr. Thomas did not stay in a positive frame of mind toward them. The end was in sight with this administrator, and the board members were aware of the difference in their relationship with the administrator. Mr. Evans noted that the "fire had gone out a little bit" in Mr. Thomas, but he felt that was probably normal for a person in his position. He was quick to point out that, "Anything we have asked him to do or follow-up on, he has been more than willing to follow-up on." Pastor Smith said that since the last time we had spoken some things the administrator could improve on had been shared with him, "but none were strife-

causing or major.” After Mr. Thomas announced his resignation, board members expressed the desire for him and the board to finish well. They believed it was their role not only to see that things ended positively, but that they should also help to set the stage for the smooth transition of the new administrator. In light of the announcement, they seemed pleased and a little surprised that the end of the year was going smoothly. Mr. White said that he was a little worried that some things that were Mr. Thomas’ special projects might get “installed” at the end of his term as administrator, “But that hasn’t happened. We are all still working together well, and his desire is for the good of the school, not for himself. He is not interested in leaving his own stamp on things — he thinks the ministry is more important than he is.” Ms. Clark reflected on the fact that Mr. Thomas’ decision to leave would benefit the school. Mr. Thomas is leaving things in order, she felt, and it may be a good time to pass the job on to someone new to take the school further in the future. She mused,

It is very hard to have a high school level and maintain accreditation, which our school has done. I believe it would be good for some of the other schools like ours to come together to have one high school. Maybe the next administrator would be more of a help with that.

Ms. Clark and other board members expressed the thought that it was the right time for Mr. Thomas to step down. This kind of thinking influenced her role when she served on the selection committee. She used that role to find someone she thought could take the school to the “next level.”

Summary

Each board member perceived that it was part of his or her role to evaluate the administrator. However, the elements of that evaluation took different forms with each of the members. It took the administrator to remind the board to do a formal evaluation of his work. The administrator's final evaluation was done by a few and approved by the rest. According to Mr. Thomas, they seemed to value anecdotal reports over observable data. Most board members seemed comfortable reflecting on many aspects that would not be included on a standard administrative evaluation.

Perception 8: My Role is to be a Fund Raiser and Financial Controller

All the board members felt that it was their responsibility to pay close attention to the school's finances. Finance is a universal and perpetual problem in small private schools and they believe that a board member has to take a leading role in seeing that money is generated to support the school's activities and well spent in implementing those activities. How each saw the proper way to play that role, however, varied with the person – just as each saw the most important aspects of the financial question from a different perspective. The varying role definitions emerged as four categories: awareness, contribution, involvement, and champion.

Awareness. Since its inception, this school has faced tight economic times. A variety of issues stemmed from the school's tight finances. "If the finances are not in order," Mr. White said, summing up the board's collective view, "you are so focused on money issues that you can't do anything else. We need to concentrate on the long range more."

The board members felt that part of their role was to be aware of the school's financial picture. They had a responsibility to understand its status, challenges, and possible future. Mr. Jones found it all very challenging and stated,

We have had a lack of growth in the school. This causes a financial burden on the school. Do we cut back teachers? What services get cut? How do you prepare a budget and make plans? How do we increase students and revenues and not bring on more expenses? I wish I had more answers.

Contribution. How each member played the role differed with his or her sense of purpose and a sense of what he or she might be able to contribute. Mr. Evans, the CPA, for example, saw his role as educator and context definer. He brought in data that related to such things as employee compensation and tax information before financial decisions were made. Ms. Clark felt that her role was to share her business experience with the other board members and work to influence their decisions.

Involvement. Three board members felt that their role went beyond recognizing, understanding and providing perspective in considering financial questions. These three perceived that their role was to closely oversee budgets and expenditures. This role perception was a source of conflict with the head administrator who felt the board "tied his hands" in their strict oversight of school finances.

Champion. In sorting the data, it became clear that certain board members felt it was their role to champion certain groups or activities in their financial plan. Mr. Jones and Professor Johnson, for example, felt that their role was to promote better salaries for teachers and were prepared to lead the charge to enrich the salary schedule. "At this point, it is not standard for all," Johnson said, "and it needs to be increased

significantly.” He felt that if progress was not made in that area, it would only become a larger issue to deal with later.

Pastor Baker and Ms. Clark were both concerned about the young families they knew who could not afford the school. Some had to leave the school because they could not continue to bear the financial burden required. Pastor Baker said, “There has to be a way to do enough development so that there is scholarship money available to folks so their tuition can be lower.”

Ms. Clark felt very strongly that it was the board’s role to lead in formulating a public relations plan.

We are the best kept secret in town. It is going to take a good reputation built up from what we do well, and a good PR plan. The kind of plan we need would include forming a foundation and an endowment for scholarships. There are families who attend this school and pay more for it each month than they do for their mortgage. It is so hard!

The board members believed that the financial burdens could be lifted with the right public relations campaign. In addition, if tuition were lowered, more students could be added which would, in turn, increase revenues. When discussing finances, three board members mentioned public relations as a major issue during the first interviews. By the time of the second interviews the administrator search was in its final stages and every board member mentioned public relations as a major need of the school. All felt that, as a board, they should be finding a way to “get the name out” in a positive light as a part of the effort to increase enrollment and raise more funds.

Summary

While all the board members shared the perception that they had an important role to play in directing school finances, four specific areas of concern shook out in the analysis. All were very aware that financial concerns affected every other aspect of governance. Some were most concerned about the day-to-day budgeting allocations and the implementation of funded programs. Others felt a need to champion particular causes within the financial framework, such as improving teachers' salaries and providing tuition support to worthy families. All perceived their roles to include playing a part in raising money for the school. Once again, the board members' perceptions were congruent at the macro level, but differing at the elemental level. These differences held the potential for generating conflict when decisions had to be made on the allotment of a finite number of dollars.

Perception 9: My Role is to Maintain Positive Relationships with the Teachers

The board members considered their relationships with the teachers to be very important. They believed that they should be supportive of the teachers in as many ways as possible. This board was accessible to the teachers. Not only because the school was small, but because the board members had contact, as parents, with the teachers. The board planned social times and official meetings with teachers, as well as welcoming them to the open board meetings.

The board's relationship with the teachers had been basically a positive one according to the board members. But, as with other issues, the relationship depended on the events that were transpiring at the board level which affected teachers. The

relationship depended on factors that went beyond just how the board treated the teachers themselves. It was strained during a tumultuous time the year before because the teachers perceived that the board was not fulfilling its role to support the administrator. When all was said and done, the majority of the board did stand behind Mr. Thomas, which led to an improved relationship between the board and the teachers this year. As far as next year, things were very much in the “wait and see” mode. As the board saw it, they would have to continue to support the new administrator and work with him or her on the issue that affected the teachers the most, increasing salaries. Because it is the board’s role to maintain positive relationships with the school’s teachers, the members were quick to point out the evidence for that positive relationship.

To Mr. Evans, and several others, the proof of a good relationship between the board and the teachers was the fact that the school had experienced very low turnover in the past, and that looked like the case for the next school year as well. It was obvious that the board members felt that their role in the low turnover rate was to support the administration in hiring a dedicated, qualified faculty. They also believed they facilitated a positive working environment by being accessible through meetings with the faculty.

Pastor Smith thought that, over the years, the relationship with teachers should receive a grade of ‘B’ or ‘B+.’ “To get their input is important. I have talked to them privately on some issues and then brought those things to the table to assist us in decision making.” He thought that any misunderstandings that come up between the

board and teachers could be cleared up by teachers coming to one or two board meetings a year. "I know they are busy, but so is the board. If they would come just once a year and just stay for half the meeting, it would do so much for them to have a better feel for what is going on." Pastor Smith was the board member in charge of the board/faculty meeting that took place once a year. The whole board did not attend, just its representative, in this case Pastor Smith. The meeting was an opportunity for teachers to share their concerns.

I think the meeting went very well last year. I was able to give them the board's feelings on the issues that they brought up. I also took their input and shared it at the next board meeting. The administrator is at that meeting with teachers as well.

The other board members agreed with Pastor Smith that their role was to listen to the teachers' concerns and get their input.

Mr. White believed that it was the board's role to find a way to pay the teachers more as well as get much needed resources to the classrooms. Mr. White and the rest of the board members felt that the main issue with the teachers was the "money end of it." The teachers have to work with fewer resources than they or the board desire. Mr. White said,

This last fall there was a misunderstanding on the money that was made on the banquet. The money reported to them was the gross amount, and it was already budgeted. They did not know that and thought it was extra money they should be able to use to meet classroom needs.

Mr. White did not believe that the teachers as fully understood what he believed to be the intent of the board — to work to improve things for them financially. But he was also quick to point out that in the last three years the school had not lost a teacher.

Mr. Green perceived the board's job was to make sure that the teachers could openly communicate with the board. Mr. Green said,

I think that sometimes the teachers get the idea the board is mandating things that make it seem at times it is us against them. We have open meetings, and they come if there is an issue. They aren't shy about coming, even if they don't get the answers they want.

Mr. Evans thought the teachers should go to the administrator first before coming to the board. Last year the board's role was to listen to the concerns and respond through the administrator. The teachers had been very supportive of Mr. Thomas in the past. Last year they made it clear that they supported him in the midst of some problems with parents and board members.

Some interactions between the board, Mr. Thomas, and the teachers led to role confusion on the board's part. Each year the teachers meet with a board representative. At those meetings there was a time when Mr. Thomas left the room and the teachers were free to bring up concerns about him. It was then the board members' role to share these concerns with Mr. Thomas. It is interesting to note that the board members had been reminded by the administrator to go through him to interact with teachers, and yet he was in support of an annual board/teacher meeting which did not include him. Another confusing signal to the board from Mr. Thomas, which influenced their perceptions, was that sometimes he told teachers who had board-level issues to write letters to the members and put them in their mailboxes at the school. "I think they have a right to do that," he said.

Pastor Baker cited the fact that Mr. Thomas chose to leave the school, that it was not the board's decision, as a reason for a continued positive relationship with the teachers. He acknowledged that Mr. Thomas had been a popular leader with his staff. Pastor Baker realized that Mr. Thomas could have aired issues he had with the board with the teachers, but he had not done that, which "speaks well of his character." As Mr. Thomas' time drew to a close, Pastor Baker and most of the other members indicated that it was the board's role to communicate only positively about Mr. Thomas, especially to the teachers who held him in high regard.

With one exception, board members' perceptions of the board's role did not include maintaining personal relationships with the teachers. None of the board members reflected on a personal relationship with the teachers as board members. They felt individual relationships with various teachers were more in the context of their role as a parent than as board member. Pastor Smith was the only one who mentioned personal communication with individual teachers as a way to receive information to inform him as a board member. He was the only member who perceived direct communication with teachers as part of a board member's role.

Summary

All the board members believed that the low turnover rate of teachers for the past several years indicated a positive relationship between the board and the faculty. Each member perceived that the faculty was very loyal to Mr. Thomas. Over the years, the board members had been made aware that the teachers stood behind the administrator when conflict arose with the board or parents. The board members'

perception was that the teachers expected them to support the administrator. That expectation influenced their decision-making. One board member speculated that of Mr. Thomas' departure was not controversial with teachers only because it was his own decision. Even the board members who thought it was a good time to change administrators knew that would not have been the case had the board decided to relieve Mr. Thomas of his duties.

These board members perceived the teachers to be important constituents and they valued the positive relationship they had with them. They expressed concern over teacher salaries and lapses of communication from the board to the teachers. Whether or not the board's decision not to include the faculty in the hiring process for the next administrator would negatively impact the teacher/board relationship remained to be seen.

Perception 10: My Role is to Maintain Positive Relationships with the Parents

The members felt that it was the board's role to maintain quality relationships with the school's parents. All but one board member was a parent of students at the school. Not only did the board members think as parents, they listened to other parents at various functions they attended.

Pastor Baker came on the board at a time when he felt the relationship with parents was "very tense." Because of a few parents, along with some board members, he felt there was a "general perception" of a problem among most of them. He felt it was the board's role to improve the relationship with the parents through open communication, and he felt they had been successful. "This year the sense is that things

are going along pretty well, and the parents seem to be comfortable. When things are going fine, they seem to leave the board alone.”

By the time of the second interviews, the board members felt even more positive that things were improving with the parents. They based most of this on the fact that there had been no “explosions” or major negatives.

When the board members discussed the relationship between the board and the parents, they indicated that the relationship depended upon the year. All of the board members and the administrator felt that last year’s relationship between the parents and the board was not very positive because there were discussions of parental issues at the board level which should not have taken place.

In response to the previous year’s turmoil some members of the board thought it was their role to create a vehicle that provided a means for the parents to have input to the administrator and board. The board members perceived that the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) was a very good thing that was created in response to the problems of the previous year. They were suspect of past board members’ intentions when it came to the formation of the PAC. The current board members suspected that those intentions were for the committee to be a way for parents to “help administrate” the school. But after the parents and board members left who were causing the problems, the remaining board members felt the PAC became a very positive body. They were pleased with the progress of the PAC and were determined that it should continue its role and focus.

Professor Johnson found no hesitancy among parents to address the board,

The school has a group called PAC, and several of the board members are involved with that committee. They address issues and concerns, and the minutes from their meetings are brought to our board meetings. The parents can also come to board meetings.

The board's role was to have representatives meet with PAC, report back to the full board, and take action on the committee's issues. This was done to further communication and foster positive relationships with the parents.

Mr. White said the only issues he remembered being brought to board meetings this year were things like, "Can we have a ski club?" He felt parent issues like these were in stark contrast to last year's. Ms. Clark thought the board's role would be enhanced if the board could act without parents and others in attendance at all. She found the open board meeting concept strange and commented, "It is not something I am used to. We go into executive session; then it is closed. I think the meeting should be closed and we would get more done." To Ms. Clark, getting more done was a more important role than having public interaction. She did admit that some of the sharing from parents at the board meetings had been positive and helpful, and she thought, "The board needs to communicate directly and honestly and often with the parents." Ms. Clark thought the board's role was to be a visible presence and the board members had not been visible enough.

Like at the beginning of the year there was this delightful open house and I think the board should have been there greeting every child and adult. We need more of that kind of interaction. No one of us can be at all the events, but each one can be at some of them.

Mr. Jones still remembered quite well how it felt to be "just a parent" wondering about the decisions the board members made and why they made them. "I

think there is a distant relationship there. As a parent you may wonder why they made the cutbacks they did.” He cited the board newsletter as one form of communication. Last year some members felt the newsletter was used by the previous board president to push a personal agenda. So the newsletter was not wholeheartedly seen as an effective way to communicate with parents. Mr. Jones was convinced that it was the role of the board to communicate regularly and clearly with the parents.

I don’t have a great way to bridge the communication gap. There is a yearly association meeting and usually only 40-50 parents are there. There are very few that come to a board meeting — only those with an issue on their minds.”

The board members were generally positive about communication between the board and parents, but they were split about actual parent involvement in decision-making. Board members were unimpressed with the turnout at the annual parent meetings. Pastor Smith said, “I would give them a ‘D+’ for attendance at things like that, and for attendance at board meetings. I think the board does our best to communicate through the minutes, which are posted, the newsletter, and the open meetings. I think our communication could always be better.” One solution he saw as helping the situation would be to schedule meetings to “sell” Christian education. He thought the parents were in need of a “Biblical philosophy” about why they should be in a Christian school. “I think that it would go a long way to help us with having parents that are involved if they knew why it is important to have their children at a Christian school.” Pastor Smith, Pastor Baker, and Mr. Evans thought it was the

board's role to provide an opportunity for the parents to learn more about the importance of Christian schools.

As with the teachers, the board members only shared their perceptions of relationships with the parents from the stand point of the board as an entity. They perceived their personal relationships with parents to be as another parent, not as a board member, although acknowledging it was sometimes difficult to separate the two roles.

Summary

Overall, the board members were very pleased with the relationship they currently enjoyed with the parents. This perception was evidenced by the fact that there had been no "explosions" since last year in the board/parent relationship. The only dissatisfaction with the relationship voiced by most board members had to do with the very low turnout by parents at annual parent meetings. Considering the problems caused by a few parents last year, the board members seemed content to deal with some current apathy as opposed to the past conflict. Surprising to some was the lack of parental interest in the administrative change that was occurring. Whether this was one more indication of apathy or of a growing trust by the parents toward the board was unknown. Some board members perceived their relationship with the parents more as one-way. They were inclined to decide and then communicate the decision. In this thinking, the board was not considering the parents to be full partners.

Perception 11: My Role is to be a Peacemaker

The board members saw themselves as peacemakers, and they saw their role as seeking unity within the board so that they could display a united front to all observers. The board members perceived their relationships with each other to be growing stronger in the aftermath of conflict during the previous school year. The relationships on this board seemed to be warm, but not overly close. It was an evenly divided board in terms of experienced versus inexperienced board members. The ones who had served the longest together had the closest relationships. Because several new members had joined the board recently, they had begun to develop relationships with each other as well.

Having come through the tough year last year and feeling better about this year, the relationships seemed to be improving by the time of the second interviews. The committee assignments seemed to compliment the board members' abilities. The confidence of the new members had grown noticeably. They seemed to be enjoying themselves and appreciating each other. This was important to them in achieving the goal of a unified board working together for the good of the school.

By the time of the second interviews, elections for next year's board had taken place. The role for new board members was to begin to attend board meetings months before they could vote or be "official" board members. Two new members had begun to attend meetings as non-voting observers for the rest of the school year. Pastor Smith was going off the board after serving for nine years, as was Mr. Green after

serving for five. Some members speculated on what the new members would bring to the board and how they would change board dynamics and the board's role.

Significant to the relationships within the board was the fact that this board was to be joined by a member from a church that had never been represented on this board before. There are some doctrinal differences between this board member's church and the churches of the other board members. The new member could whole-heartedly sign the doctrinal statements of the school, and so his name was allowed to stand for election, and he won a seat on the board. The consensus seemed to be that sometime, in some way, this difference could become an issue on the board in the years to come.

As Professor Johnson put it,

I wish I knew more about how the board next year will get along. There are the two new members and three of us who were new last year. You can tell some are wondering about the one particular new board member. It will be interesting to see if there are doctrinal issues that surface. Right now everyone gets along.

The other board members perceived their roles as keepers of the peace and workers to help the board stay unified, even with different viewpoints represented. If doctrinal issues surfaced, they indicated they would not discuss them. While Professor Johnson tried to keep his approach one that sought support for decisions from an educational viewpoint, he felt that there were others on the board who did not start their decision making from that point, so he could see the possibility of some future "lines being drawn."

Mr. Evans thought the new members were going to be good for the board based on the fact that they had been asking good questions at the meetings they had

attended so far. Asking good questions is a role he had assumed as a new member, and one he expected the new members to assume as well. But he also found it hard to lose members with whom one is used to working and with whom he had developed an understanding on issues.

Mr. White thought that he and the others should keep their discussions away from doctrinal issues because those issues do not affect the operation of the school. He shared his thoughts on future relationships on the board:

The new people look like they will be really good. They have strong assets to bring to the board. They have different views than we have had in the past. One of them goes to a church that has not been represented on the board before. His testimony is solid. He will not water down the position of the school. We will be more accepting of some views. I agree with the author who said years ago, 'If we would concentrate on the 90% we agree on instead of the 10% we disagree on, we could accomplish more.' After all we are not a church.

In my experience, the governance of this kind of school often is "church-like" in its approach. The board members shared that in the minds of many of the constituents of the school, it was a big step to have elected a board member who represents a very different church doctrinally.

Professor Johnson was new to the board this year and did not feel he had significant personal relationships with other board members, "We don't have much of a relationship except at the meetings. I am not a parent and I don't share in a lot of the activities that go on, like ball games. I don't have much of a relationship with them." He felt it is important to respect one another and the differing views, but that is the

only relationship in his mind. He believed his role was to offer respect and maintain his independence.

Mr. Jones was also a first year board member, but he felt differently. "I would not say these are my best friends yet, but I think it is important to have a friendship and a working relationship. That is what I am trying to do." He felt that when those relationships became established, the board members would realize that his role is to always follow his conscience on issues even when his views do not agree with others on the board. He has not had the experience of being alone on an issue yet. Mr. Jones was striving to maintain a professional as well as a personal role with the other members.

Another new member was Ms. Clark. As the only woman on the board, she felt she was still establishing relationships. She found it "very challenging" being the only female voice and thought there should be more women on the board. Ms. Clark felt that board members should speak their minds and be open and honest. She felt that she was "outspoken" when necessary and that some other board members did not know how to take her yet. In her opinion, it was a board member's role to be outspoken.

Pastor Smith believed it was important for him and for each of the members to see himself or herself as members of a team and to remain very cooperative. He described the relationships he had with other members as "cordial."

Mr. Evans described times that the board had disagreements on issues and how he thought he needed to respond at those times,

We can go round and round about things, but when it is all said and done, I think you have to stick together, and I have done that. Even if the decision has not been made unanimously, I have encouraged others that all have to support it when it is made. I think we really have had that on this board.

Pastor Baker was in the position of having taught some of the board members' children when he was a teacher at the school several years ago. He considered that to be a part of the reason that his relationship with the other members was "pretty good," but also thought that might be because he had not been "pushing a lot of things either." "If I was more aggressive it might be different. I think the ideal relationship is one where there is give and take. It should be where people feel comfortable expressing their ideas." Pastor Baker did not think it was the role of a board member to be aggressive, but to work as a team.

Summary

After the events of the past year, these board members perceived the role they should maintain with each other was to stay unified and discourage conflict. Two members expressed concern that because of the past conflict, the need to be unified could lead to some "group think" if the members were not careful.

One issue on the minds of all the members was the change in the make-up of the board as it pertained to doctrine and church affiliation. One new member was from a denomination not new to the school, but previously unrepresented on the school board. It was obvious his work was going to be scrutinized in the coming year. Most of the members thought this was a move in the right direction although a few were cautious.

Perception 12: My Role is to Plan for the Future

The board members contemplated their future role. They felt the role they would be playing in the near future would set the tone for many years to come. The board members believed that it was a pivotal time in the school's history, and that affected their outlook and decision making. There were both those anxious to cease involvement with day-to-day operations and those who were not ready to let go completely.

Besides their reflections about the future as it pertained to policy making, some members gave thought to other future details. Three members discussed what, to them, were priorities for the future.

Mr. White emphasized that efficiency in conducting board business had improved and should continue to be improved. He believed that for him to have a successful year as a board member, one of the keys would be to have a president who had an organized agenda. "I don't want to get going on more rabbit trails. This has been a good year in that way, and it needs to continue." Because Mr. Smith, the president, had been unavailable to lead the board for several months, there was some doubt about the leadership of the board for the future. With or without Mr. Smith, the board members perceived that it would take strong leadership in the future to continue to build a strong board. The question of who would serve actively as president in the future was an issue that must be settled soon.

Mr. Evans thought that the focus of the board members was the most important element. If they made sure their focus was appropriate, problems could be avoided.

Next year Mr. Evans will concentrate on the “big picture” and encourage others to stay out of the details. His intention was to remind the board to get back on track, if necessary. “I think that getting down into the trivial slows the process and divides people. I will try to avoid that.”

Mr. Green knew that the board had to “stop helping the administrator with his role,” but that was not the greatest future concern to him. He wanted the board to concentrate on the greatest need of the school -- hiring a development director. Mr. Green’s time on the board was coming to an end, but he wanted to be sure to influence the future as much as he could by focusing attention on this area because he considered it to be their “Achilles’ heel”.

Summary

In the board members’ minds the school’s future was bright. They were excited about their role in that future. The past strife was over, there had been major changes on the board and a new administrator would be taking over. This led to a very optimistic board.

Summary of Role Perceptions

After all the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, there emerged twelve role perceptions. The board members’ perceptions of their roles were: respond to the call, be advocates for Christian education, make a unique and positive difference, select quality leadership personnel, raise funds and control them, make policy, evaluate the administrator, maintain positive relationships with the teachers and the parents, act as peacemakers, be students of board basics, and plan for the future.

In fulfilling all these roles, conflict was inevitable because they saw their roles differently, yet had to work together. For example, some believed they should just set policy – others believed they should actively enter into school operation. Other differences that could result in conflict were the prioritizing of issues. For example, some wanted teacher salaries addressed immediately, others perceived some other issue to be more important. The board did not address the potential conflict because the previous school year was fresh in the minds of these board members. It had been fraught with tough issues which stemmed from role confusion by this board, and role confusion appeared to be ongoing.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to investigate how board members perceive their roles. Using interviews as the means of data collection, protocols were structured from the available literature and from my own experience with independent Christian school boards.

Interviews were conducted with eight board members and the head administrator twice during the 2002-2003 school year. The constant comparison method of data analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) was used to identify themes and perceptual categories.

The grand tour question asked by this study was: How do board members perceive their roles?

The individual board member's role and the whole board's role were difficult for the informants to separate. Therefore, they often answered the questions from both the individual board member's and the collective board's viewpoint. Role perception has to do with the perceptions that one has of the role expectations he or she perceives others or the organization has for him or her.

This chapter identifies the roles the board members saw themselves playing and the conflict that resulted from those roles. It also identifies a key "expected" role which did not emerge. The findings are presented in light of current research. Findings not addressed by the literature are also discussed along with recommendations for further research and practice.

Perception 1: My Role is to Respond to the Call

The board members' overall perception was they felt "called" to serve on such a board. In every participant's opinion, the spiritual dimension of a board member's life was the most crucial dimension.

These board members had definite ideas about important characteristics necessary for service on a board like theirs. The most important characteristic to each member was having a strong spiritual life and a knowledge of "God's Word" as found in the Bible. This was the characteristic each and every one expected of himself, each other, the administrator, and the teachers. This may indicate that only those with this strong sense of calling would step forward to serve in the capacity of board member.

From this strong spiritual life came the passion to serve as a board member. Each was zealous about serving the school. All of them felt the job was more a "calling," and that motivation made the stressful times a little easier to endure. There was no question about these board members' good intentions.

Perception 2: My Role is to be an Advocate for Christian Education

Another issue raised by three board veterans was the board's role in gaining support for Christian education. The remaining board members agreed this was an important issue, but did not elaborate. The veterans did not expect support from the general public, but felt that even the Christian community lacked understanding and withheld support. Their perception was that the likely supporters for Christian schools did not fully understand their purpose or mission. These three thought the support for Christian education was an important issue which would impact the future of Christian

education. They also thought that it was the board's job to address it, but they were not sure how that should be done. It has been my experience that those who govern independent Christian schools often perceive them to be suffering from a "best kept secret" syndrome among groups who seem to be likely participants in such a school.

These board members, like many others involved in Christian education, had no real solution to the perceived dilemma that Christian schools lacked the support of those they intended to serve. The veteran board members were frustrated by this issue. One reason given for the departure of one of them was that in spite of its efforts, the board had not been able to increase tangible support for Christian education in general and this school in particular. To these board members, one very important indication of tangible support would be the financial backing by various churches, which was sorely lacking. All this resulted in a real sense of inner tension in some board members as they worked to reconcile their commitment to the calling with the disappointing reality of minimal support from so many quarters.

Perception 3: My Role is to Make a Unique and Positive Difference

All of the board members felt duty-bound to behave in such a way as to make a positive difference in the school. Each expressed how he or she had done so in the past and would continue to do so in the future. The board's expectations had been shared with each new member when he or she was asked to run in the first place. When discussing individual and board contributions, the individuals reflected on unique skill sets possessed by each and every member. From these skills came the contributions which made a positive difference in the lives of students, teachers, and the school's

families. While each board member perceived a need to push his or her own agenda, each also recognized the need for the board to achieve consensus before it could act and allocate human and financial resources. Perceiving a need to make an individual contribution also increased the potential for conflict among board members and with the administrator because it caused several board members to see roles for themselves that went beyond policy making.

The board was very deliberate in its efforts to gain members qualified for very specific roles. In the opinion of all the members, this board had done well in going after a wide variety of expertise which had improved the board's quality.

Marlowe (1997) and Sheehan (1990) contend that nominating committees of boards should seek "qualified" board members for election. In this sense, the word "qualified" means the members would have knowledge of a school board's proper role. This particular board did not seek board members who were necessarily qualified as school board members as implied in this definition. It was this board's practice to seek experts in particular fields such as business, finance, maintenance, public relations, education, etc. to serve in their area of expertise as the board had need. Therefore, there seemed to be a designated comfort zone for each member from which he or she contributed to the board's overall good. This board had reshaped the definition of qualified. It was beneficial on one hand in that it drew in specific expertise that the school could not afford to buy – but it had a dark side as well. In perceiving themselves as experts, their perceived need for training was reduced. Using this definition of qualified may even have increased their resistance to seek formal training.

This search for experts seemed to be an effective approach from which similar boards could benefit. However, being experts in a variety of areas is not a substitute for specific, deliberate training. In addition to finding the needed experts, board members could be further strengthened by quality formal training which would teach them the proper role of a board and help them become truly qualified for their roles.

Perception 4: My Role is to be a Student of Board Basics

Each individual board member shared that a board member should engage in some kind of training for the job, but they did not individually see that need in themselves. Preparation or a lack of it can either positively or negatively influence board members' perceptions of competence as they approach their roles. The quality of board training affects the board's performance. The board members expressed that they should be learning more about being board members. They had various opportunities to learn, but quality formal board training was not engaged in by the board members. The data suggested a clear need for formal board training by this board.

The most common type of training for boards is the use of national or regional conventions and board retreats (Grady & Krumm, 1998). An alternative for this board could be a national or regional training convention hosted by an association for Christian school boards. This board had never been to such a convention. This board had not had a retreat in recent years. Head administrators from across the nation believe that boards could use training in relationships, duties, roles, interpersonal skills, how to conduct a head administrator search, understanding conflicts of interest and

how to be a board member (Grady & Krumm, 1998). The board members' perception was that their training was sufficient. This illustrates that perception can overpower objective assessment. They could agree with the administrator that more formal training would be a good thing, but obviously not necessarily crucial to fulfill their role adequately. This lack of agreement on the importance of formal training led to some of the strain between the administrator and the board. The administrator had attended such training for boards, and was frustrated because he perceived the board was lacking in understanding. It was clear from the interviews that board members did not understand role delineation. If board members were trained in the beginning to recognize what was and was not board business, many problems could be avoided. There were three board members who discussed the operation of the school and the board as if it were the same thing. Formal training would clear up this misconception.

One obstacle to the training of board members has always been time (Smoley, 1999). That was definitely the argument these board members used. Each board member expressed the perception that he or she already had given enough time to board duties and could not spare more for lengthy board training. Although admittedly still in the process of learning, the board members perceived themselves to be adequately trained for the job, and they approached their roles with unwarranted confidence.

This board felt that by choosing board members who were experts in a particular field, some of the need for training could be circumvented. The best example of this was the way the board pursued the man they wanted to serve as board treasurer.

He had experience with non profit organizations as a CPA before serving as board treasurer. There were numerous other examples as well. These board members believed that their role included recruitment of qualified board members. Here again, their redefinition of qualified board member was holding them back from giving formal board training to individuals with specific expertise of another kind.

By their own admission, the board members had not read and internalized all the material provided for them. Besides reading large volumes of policies and procedures, the only other training for the members was on the job. All the members mentioned how helpful it was to serve a few months before becoming an official member; watching, listening, and asking questions at the meetings. As valuable as they perceived learning on the job to be, it became another reason that they could not be convinced to spend the time and money necessary for more formal training. There seemed to be blindness to the fact that they did not fully understand how a school board was to function. In the future, this board would be operating with more new members, potentially a new president, and a new administrator. Formal training could help all the board members to be on the same page to start the new year. It seems clear that if the board members continued to select qualified experts, gave them on-the-job training, and invested time and money in relevant formal board training, the positive momentum they were experiencing would continue and past mistakes could be avoided in the future.

Perception 5: My Role is to be a Policy Maker – And Perhaps More

The board members perceived their most important role to be that of policy making while providing effective leadership. This is a common issue grappled with by many boards (Ramirez, 1995; Schultz, 1998; Streich, 1999). The tendency is to become involved in the school's day-to-day operation (Carver, 1998). Five board members and the administrator felt that this was a key area of role conflict. Each felt that progress was being made but that progress must continue in this area.

Surprisingly, all the board members readily admitted the board's forays into school administration. In fact, along with their admissions they indicated they were now openly discussing their proper role. Two of them described this new dimension to their role — pausing to discuss the appropriateness of issues before taking them on in the first place. These individuals believed last year's turmoil had produced this added dimension.

In theory, the board members knew that the role they should be playing did not include administration of the school. They were experiencing a common phenomenon, in that their espoused theories of behavior did not always match their actions (Argyris, 2003). Verbally, the board members expressed knowledge of certain boundaries where their role should end. In practice, they crossed over those boundaries. Although sometimes they gave the impression they had found a "better way" by participating in administration when they deemed it necessary, that really was not the case. The conflicts of the past had proven clear role delineation was necessary. When they expanded their role in this way, they were letting circumstances control them. In order

for the board members to make progress in role delineation, they needed to develop long term policies which would be in place to smoothly handle circumstances as they arise.

It seemed doubtful that just the positive energy being created by an administrative change would be enough to end the embedded role confusion. Conventional wisdom tells us that recognizing a problem is half the battle. If that is true, this board was indeed on the right road to abstaining from school administration. If, on the other hand, there are always exceptions to the rule, they may stray back into the role they say they know they need to leave. Half the board members would help with administration only as long as they determined that the new administrator needed their help. This thinking had not resulted in clearly defined role boundaries. Instead, the murkiness of past role definitions was likely to continue.

Every board member expressed the belief that setting policy was the board's main function, which was consistent with the literature (Ramirez, 1995; Schultz, 1998; Streich 1999). Policy setting should look to the future; policy setting on an "as needed" basis can cause the school's future to be neglected (Deuink & Herbster, 1986). Unfortunately, most policy setting by this board had been done on an "as needed" basis, and it lacked a future oriented outlook. All the board members realized this and to them it seemed to be "business as usual."

Previous literature reviewed on school boards also revealed that boards often fail to set policies in accordance with their mission statement (Ramirez, 1995). The school's unique nature was very evident to all the board members, and they

acknowledged the need for policies that fit. None mentioned the school's mission statement. Sligh (1999) believes that in order to set the necessary policy, Christian school board members should be able to articulate and communicate their philosophy of Christian education. Although the board members did not refer to the school's mission statement, each did communicate a philosophy of Christian education. The philosophies they expressed were consistent with each other, but they did not express whether or not they were consistent with the school's mission statement.

Perception 6: My Role is to Select Quality Leadership Personnel

This particular board was in the midst of searching for a new administrator. Every board member perceived the search to be the number one issue facing the board and the school. The board members felt it was their job to get the best man or woman for the job. The search had been implemented and was underway during the study. The board members expressed confidence in the search; the administrator did not. He felt that a major flaw in the process was the lack of faculty representation on the search committee. There were two board members who thought faculty involvement would have been a good idea, but not crucial. These board members perceived the search to be their job and theirs alone. Considering the loyalty of the faculty to the current administrator, it may have been beneficial to include them in the search for the next administrator. Their involvement may have increased their support of this important personnel decision when it was time for the board to make it.

The board members were showing leadership in recognizing that this was a crucial role for them to be playing which demanded their full attention. The results of

the administrator search would impact the school for years to come. The most important outcome would be for the board members to establish good relations with the new administrator and clear expertise delineation between him or her and the board.

The search seemed to give positive energy to the board members. Even though the board members seemed to regret the current administrator's decision to leave, they expressed an excitement about the new administrator search. Hiring a new administrator was thought to be a tangible step forward toward leaving the recent controversies behind. This issue infused excitement into the board members as they reflected on the future.

Perception 7: My Role is to Evaluate the Administrator

The perception of all the board members was that in such a small environment, the board members were very accessible to individuals and groups. The board members' accessibility to the administrator very much intensified their relationships, which influenced their roles. This up close contact with the administrator made formal evaluation of his performance difficult. Because of a lack of understanding of the formal evaluation process, the board members were reluctant to formally evaluate Mr. Thomas, and when they did so, he was not in agreement with the process. The administrator evaluations which were shared verbally by the members were informal and ongoing over the years. They were mostly favorable. The board members seemed to have an ongoing impression of the job done by the administrator that included two broad categories: his overall achievements spanning all the years he served the school

and his specific accomplishments in relation to each member's priority issues. As any evaluation guideline will argue, these are inappropriate measures.

This board and administrator had gone through a tumultuous time together, especially the preceding year. The previous board president caused much turmoil when he intervened to "help" settle issues which should have been left solely with the administrator. The administrator survived, but the wounds never seemed to completely heal. One board member expressed it as "edginess" in the relationship between the board and the administrator, and it was noticeable.

Role uncertainty often plagues head administrators (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998). This was certainly true in this case. This administrator did not feel the board demonstrated enough trust in him. Although these board members supported him during the previous year's crisis, he perceived it to be too little, too late. When he pushed trust issues to the forefront, the board did not respond the way the administrator desired. The members perceived that they had fully supported the administrator by their words and actions, even when the previous board president had not. The administrator said he appreciated those actions, but wanted more trust in his handling of the finances. This unresolved trust issue had a definite negative impact on the administrator/board relationship. What board members perceived as a non-issue to them was one reason the administrator was leaving. Demonstrating trust of the head administrator by trusting him or her with more financial decisions did not seem likely, which did not bode well for the future administrator.

Expert opinion is that board members should hire the right person and then support him/her completely (Carver, 1998; Schultz, 1998). The process of hiring the next administrator was underway. The indications given by some board members that that they intended to continue “helping” the new administrator were reasons for concern. The current administrator perceived that the next administrator would have to immediately begin to build trusting relationships with the board members in order to be successful. This can be accomplished through open and complete communication with the board (Kynerd, 1998). Open and complete communication eluded this board and its administrator. The signals given by Mr. Thomas to the board were often not direct enough which led to more role confusion. The interviews revealed that the board felt more positively about their relationship with the administrator than the administrator did. School boards have very often drawn criticism for micromanaging and failing to collaborate effectively with head administrators (IASB, 2000).

Perception 8: My Role is to be a Fundraiser and Financial Controller

The fundraising and financial control issues facing this board came as no surprise. All the board members discussed the pressure they felt stemming from the responsibility for the school’s financial health. Financial issues take up the most time on most Christian school boards, and much time and attention goes into fundraising (Convey, 1995). Financial concerns were at or near the top for all board members when describing the most important issues facing them. These board members perceived that raising sufficient funds was their most challenging responsibility. Fundraising efforts began at the board level. This particular year they were clearly

spending more of their time on issues like finding the next administrator. Long term financial issues can only be effectively addressed in a context of relative calm. To determine the board's role in fund raising and how much the responsibility of fund raising could be delegated to the volunteer parents were ongoing issues.

Finances are so important that they color all the other issues with which the board must deal. All the board members wanted to pay the teachers more, but all believed the school's tuition was already as much as the market could bear. This impacted their perceptions of the teachers. They expressed gratitude for a faculty who had stayed through good times and bad. This was remarkable since the salaries of the school were not competitive with public school salaries.

Another financial issue involved the current facility in which the school was located. The building was leased from a public school district with no guarantees for the future. The board did not believe the building was entirely suitable for the school's needs. The need for a new or different facility in the near future was expressed by three board members as crucial, and they believed it was their job to find one. The board members understood that the acquisition of a new facility would include a large capital campaign to raise the necessary funds. Decisions facing the board members included determining if it would be more cost effective to build a new structure or renovate an existing one. They also had to determine how to raise the necessary monies to relocate while concurrently operating on a tight budget.

This board maintained tight control of the finances. This caused the current administrator to feel as though the board did not trust him. The board members'

perception was that although they maintained financial control, they had total trust in the administrator. They did not believe the board's financial duties should change. The board had taken more financial control years ago when there was a problem with a previous administrator and finances. The board members felt that the current system of financial responsibilities was working well. The school was making progress, becoming more financially secure. They did not perceive this to be a potential issue with the future administrator. They also were not totally aware of the current administrator's negative feelings toward the board's financial control. Clearly, there was a need to differentiate between the board's role in setting financial policy and administration's role in budget formation and execution. This need was another argument for formal board training.

All board members expressed the belief that an effective public relations program would bring in more students and raise money for teacher salaries and scholarships for those in need. Three believed this to be the biggest issue facing the board, and these three expressed a desire to take the lead in public relations efforts. Authorities on school boards also urge increased communication with the public and the development of specific policies for public relations (IASB, 1996).

The area of finances was one of tight board control. The board was responsible for developing a public relations plan to increase enrollment, beginning a capital campaign to finance a new school, as well as bearing responsibility for all other fundraising. It would seem beneficial to prioritize the big issues and give up the micromanagement of smaller, daily financial concerns to concentrate on the larger ones.

Because there are data suggesting that school funding is tied to student achievement, even though money does not guarantee academic success (Land, 2002), school boards need to identify and fund only effective policies and programs.

Perception 9: My Role is to Maintain Positive Relationships with Teachers

Every board member felt that it was his or her role to foster and facilitate positive relationships with the teachers. The previous school year teachers had come to the board meetings with complaints about the way the board was handling the conflict with some parents, some board members, and the head administrator. The board members learned that the teachers supported the administrator. Their interactions with the teachers were marked by respect and appreciation. These vocal teachers helped convince the board to support the administrator. As a result, the board members believed that they had earned the teachers' trust and support because of the outcome — the board backing the administrator. This was not the total picture however, and it showed a communication disconnect by some of the board members. When this study took place, the board took it as a very positive signal that no teacher had come to them with complaints of a serious nature during the current school year. Mr. Thomas did not feel the teachers totally trusted the board members' leadership, but felt they were willing to wait and hope for the best concerning important board issues like finding a replacement for Mr. Thomas.

In further discussions about the teachers, the board members revealed they generally perceived the teachers as loyal and as respected professionals to whom they should listen, but not enough to include them on the Administrative Search Committee.

Two board members believed that maintaining positive relationships with the teachers meant it was acceptable to talk directly to the teachers without the administrator's knowledge. The administrator said that direct communication between the board and teachers had been prevalent when he started in his current position. He thought the board was spending less time engaged in inappropriate communication since that time. Although the administrator complained about the board communicating directly with the teachers, he also encouraged the teachers to put notes or letters directly into board members' boxes. The administrator added to the role confusion he criticized. Surprisingly, both the board members and the administrator thought that the meeting that took place annually between board members and teachers, which excluded the administrator, was appropriate. By approving this type of meeting, the signals from the administrator to the board were again mixed. It was concerning that even after there was a new administrator in place there was no intention by some board members to go through proper channels of communication when dealing with the teachers.

Perception 10: My Role is to Maintain Positive Relationships with Parents

Communication was a key element in all the relationships that were explored. Every board member discussed his or her relationships with the parents as crucial to the school's success. The board members experienced first hand the fact that the critics of education take up about twice as much time as the supporters (Ledell, 1996). They had spent much time the previous year communicating with various individuals and groups on divisive topics. During the conflict of the previous year, the board members

were trapped. In supporting the administration they strengthened their relationship with the teachers but alienated a group of parents.

Communication with the parents had changed significantly between last year and the current year. Many parents who had demanded the administrator's resignation had left the school. This was, of course, a concern. But as the current year unfolded, the perception was that it was all for the best. To them, part of the improved climate stemmed from the fact that the parents were leaving the board alone to do its job. The board members believed they had the parents' trust now and could go forward and make the progress they had been unable to make the previous year. Their perception was that they represented the parents' interests and were more effective in their duties in the improved climate. They based this perception partly on the fact that the board had experienced very little parent communication of any kind during the current school year. The administrator and two other board members touched on what I believe could be another explanation for the lack of controversy with parents. Many parents may have been exhibiting apathy rather than support for the administration and the board. This sense of apathy was evidenced by the lack of substantive issues discussed by the board and parents, and poor attendance at school-wide parent meetings unless there were controversial topics under discussion. Even if these were definite signs of apathy, it was understandable that the board members would be enjoying the calm.

Perception 11: My Role is to be a Peacemaker

Each of the board members perceived that a cordial working relationship with one another was important. Two expressed a desire for the relationships to grow

beyond the board room and become more personal. Others seemed content with a relationship which was expressed by respecting one another's opinions. The board members seemed to be very careful with one another. As one board member put it, they seemed to desire peace "at any cost." It seemed as if this desire to remain cordial and united took precedence over the issues being discussed. But this particular year, the issues had been small and "easy" compared to the previous year. The board members' desire to be unified was definitely affecting their approach to handling the issues. At the time of the study, efforts to get along and be unified were very obvious. All but three new board members noted that much more business was being conducted this year, which partly resulted from positive board relationships. Could all these efforts at remaining unified lead to "group think" as two board members suggested? Probably not, because there were four board members ready to be involved beyond policy making if they felt it was necessary. This kind of involvement would supercede the tendency for group think.

In the future, the peace sought by the board members could become threatened. Every board member and the administrator mentioned a new relational dynamic within the board itself. All of the current board members thought there was a probable future issue with a new board member whose church was doctrinally different from any other member's church. They did not perceive there would be a future issue with his character or abilities. In fact, they had very positive things to say about him. Very early in this new relationship they were being careful. This move toward a more diverse board happened because the board perceived its role was to become more

inclusive than it had been in the past. For doctrinal issues such as these to negatively affect relationships, the board would be acting more as a church board than a school board. This type of role confusion by Christian school boards is common, in my experience.

Perception 12: My Role is to Plan for the Future

This board was eager to leave the past behind and plan for its future. By the second interviews, all the members shared some thoughts about the upcoming school year. Although discussions about the future were dominated by the search for a new administrator, the board members knew there were other issues to be concerned with so that they could progress as a board and a school.

The board members perceived that their future role would include being involved with guiding the board to deal with more of the big picture or vision of the school, seeking to hire a development director who could take responsibility for much of the fundraising work for which the board was currently responsible, and having efficient, organized board leadership. The current president had been unavailable for months and the future of that role was unresolved.

These board members exuded optimism for the future, and they perceived there to be reason for this hopeful outlook. The financial picture was improving, the parents who caused the board strife were gone, and the board members had the potential to hire a highly qualified administrator to continue the positive momentum. A future concern was that half the board members expressed that their future role depended on future circumstances. This outlook could result in circumstances driving the board's

role rather than the board determining its own future. If the board members continued to be victims of circumstance, there was no need for long term planning. But without long term planning, their future role would be a familiar one – that of reacting to crisis and putting out fires.

A Missing Role

The board's role in improving student learning was expected to be discussed by the board members, but was not. Policy setting's ultimate goal is to improve student learning. This emphasis by school boards is often lacking (Streich, 1999). The policies discussed by these board members seemed to be the board's reaction to the "tyranny of the urgent." There are few studies that link school board policies to academic outcomes, but there are many recommendations throughout the literature that they should do so (Land, 2002). Unexpectedly, the issue of improved student learning as it pertained to the board's role was an issue that was not mentioned by any board member. The board members are so involved with trying to solve financial problems as well as closely oversee the administrator; there was lack of understanding of and attention to learning outcomes.

Becoming a board that looks at the big picture, especially learning outcomes, takes in-depth planning. Such long-term planning was lacking in this board's life. Four board members and the administrator touched on this issue by discussing how the board needed to look at the "big picture" more. One veteran board member perceived that the board did indeed need to focus on its vision for the future. "Good" policy will

reflect that vision and will include a focus on improved student learning outcomes (Land, 2002).

Role Conflict

Each member had multiple role perceptions. When there was conflict between two or more of those perceived roles, one had to win out. Some perceived roles were stronger than others, role perceptions were not equal. Board members suffer two kinds of role conflict. Internal role conflict involves the board member being both a parent and a board member, both a friend of the administrator and his evaluator, both a policy-only member and a member who cannot resist being involved with the day-to-day operation of the school. External role conflict involves conflict between varying board members' priority perceptions.

This study took place during a time of calm in the life of the school board. This was especially noticeable because the board members often compared this year favorably to last year. Last year's difficult events involved some parents (including the board president) questioning a decision by the administrator. Later, the board's authority was also challenged. The board president and two other board members left the board (and later the school) over the incident. Several other families also left the school. The rest of the board members stood behind the administrator. This board was still feeling the effects of that very bleak time in the life of the school. The board members did not want last year repeated and seemed to want peace to prevail whatever the cost. The board members were more cautious now in their approach to their roles.

This board was facing a common dilemma; it had difficulty determining which decisions belonged to the professional educator and which belonged to the lay board members. A good working relationship between the school board and the administration is vital for effective governance (Bryant & Grady, 1991; Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998; James, 1967; Johnson, 1980). The conflicts come from many sources, including the interests of board members and the expectations of the administration (Bryant & Grady, 1991).

Even though the members expressed lessons had been learned, there was still cause for concern. Their commitment to “policy making only” seemed to be conditional, in that it depended on outside circumstances — namely the choice of a new administrator. Instead, a board committed to policy making would refuse to micromanage no matter what the circumstances or who held the administrative position. Obviously, an ineffective administrator should never be hired by the board in the first place. The board members should define their own role and not allow others to do that for them.

In light of what this board had gone through previously, their reflections on how circumstances affected the role they played were understandable. As the interviews progressed, it was obvious that the board was shaken by the previous year’s events. Old and new members alike shared feelings about the past and how it impacted the future. A universal finding was that this board believed it was now going in a very positive direction. The comparison between these times and recent past times was

stark. There was optimism expressed by all mixed with the caution that comes from hard-learned lessons. Only time would tell if the lessons had a lasting impact.

In discussing certain events, the perceptions were entirely different depending on the times. For example, last year the board members expressed that they had been guarded and expected the worst from the teachers and parents who attended the board meetings. They were “gun shy.” As the controversy became worse, those expectations seemed warranted. During the year in which the study took place, visits by teachers and parents to the board meetings were welcomed. These groups had not come very often, and they usually came for positive reasons. Even when they had a problem to share with the board, the board members were confident it could be resolved. This also was in stark contrast to the previous year.

“Firefighting” duty seemed to be over, which made every member feel that this was a stronger, healthier board. However, the fact that the board’s role changed so much depending on the timing of circumstances had caused a lack of stability which now had to be overcome.

The literature available on Christian schools (Carver, 1998; Deuink & Herbster, 1986) mentioned the “Matthew 18 Principle” as important to effective communication and conflict resolution. This principle calls for complaints or grievances to be kept confidential. Only those people who must be involved are included in the process of finding resolution. The parties involved should be quick to forgive each other according to this principle. Controversy should be handled at the lowest level possible. A strict chain of communication should be followed. This principle was obviously not

followed by some parents and some board members during the previous year's controversy. The board members were aware of the principle, as it was part of their board manual which they may or may not have read. Two of them expressed the opinion that it should have been followed. These members believed that the past board president and the parents did not follow the principle, and so they were not able to either. The previous president had shown a disregard for the principle when he communicated with parents his negative opinions about some of the administrator's decisions. It is very difficult to get past the emotions connected with times of turmoil to dispassionately follow such a principle. This principle, if followed, would solve small problems before they become bigger problems. It is a principle I have seen in writing in the literature of many such schools. In situations where it could be used effectively, it is often not used.

As a result of past experiences, the board members attempted to invoke the Matthew 18 Principle during the current school year. By examining the appropriateness of the issues before them, they were practicing part of this principle for conflict avoidance and resolution. Unfortunately, it is far more common to see this principle in writing rather than practice.

Recommendations for Research

The independent Christian school board would benefit from further research. To further enlighten the boards of schools such as this one, there is a need for an in-depth overview of Christian school governance in the United States and beyond. A starting point would be to examine the usefulness of the public school board model that

is followed by this board and most other independent Christian school boards. The question could be asked, "What is the most effective governance model for this type of school?"

Within this study the board members expressed that there were unique characteristics necessary to be board members. Besides the spiritual dimension, are the characteristics really so different from those necessary for public school board members? For that matter, how different is this board's role from a public school board? Are the relationships and the conflicts different? Only more research concerning Christian school boards will answer these questions.

A longitudinal study in the life of a school board could investigate the ability to predict tumultuous times ahead based on previous years. Is there a cycle of peaceful years always followed by problematic ones as perceived by some board members? If there was such a cycle, it would seem expected conflict could be more effectively dealt with than unexpected conflict.

More studies are needed for public and private school boards to be able to directly link the policies needed to improve students' achievement. What are the key variables involving the board that affect student achievement?

Finally, the effectiveness of formal training could be determined so that school boards would not be wasting their time or money on low quality training ventures. From my experiences with school boards, I believe that the proactive training of board members before they assume their role is the primary way to avoid many negative experiences highlighted in this study and repeated by many other boards. If training

could improve board performance and reduce problems that stem from board members' ignorance of a school board's role and purpose, it is too important to neglect. Time and money that are often wasted when a board does not understand its role can be significant. My past experience with school boards has caused me to be a strong proponent of board training. During this study I witnessed some painful results that stemmed from insufficient board training. Boards could be spared negative experiences like "last year" by seeking out a quality training program. Research that would gauge a board's effectiveness after receiving such training would be very helpful.

Final Thoughts

In the midst of this study, I was contacted by an independent Christian school board member in another state who had heard about the study's purpose. He was very interested in knowing the study's outcome. He described his school board as "isolated" from other similar boards. The results of this study could provide valuable information to other similar boards. This study illuminates board members' perceptions on the topics most common to other Christian school boards. For any school board to reach its maximum potential, it is imperative for its members to reflect on pertinent data. From such reflection can come analysis, application and transformation. For this particular board, perhaps future conflict that is a result of role confusion can be avoided.

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APPENDIX A

December 2, 2002

Michelle Lundgren
5016 N 105 Street
Omaha, NE 68134

IRB#: 411-02-EX

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: The Perceptions of Board Members at an Independent Christian School

Dear Ms. Lundgren:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of three years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the three year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

Ernest Prentice, PhD/gdk

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/gdk

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions
Second Interview

1. Do you perceive that you have been able to make a difference on the board this year?
If so, please describe the difference you feel you have made.
2. Has your perception of the most important issue facing this school changed since we spoke last?
Why or why not?
If it has changed, how and why did it change?
3. What is your perception of the most important characteristics of the new head administrator?
4. What is your perception of the current administrator's greatest strengths as an administrator?
5. What are your perceptions of the role the board played last year versus the role the board played this year?
6. Do you perceive that the role the board plays needs to change in any way in the future?
If so, in what way does it need to change?
7. What are your perceptions of the current relationships with the teachers?
8. What are your perceptions of the current relationships with the parents?
9. What are your perceptions of the current relationships on the board itself?
10. What do you perceive to be the most important preparation for newly elected board members?
11. What are your perceptions of the current relationships with the head administrator?
12. As you reflect upon your time on the board, are there any other important perceptions you'd like to share about your role on the board, or the board's role as a whole?